How to Make Comics the Successful Way
An Investigation into the Strategies for Successful Comics Creators

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Abstract

Success is chiefly viewed as a destination point, often containing no clear direction as to how to arrive, or assurances of when one's arrival has taken place. House this delicate theme of success amongst the vast genre of comics books and several questions occur: "What is success?" "Who has previously been successful?" "How did they gain success?" "What are the proven routes to success?"

This study explores the different methods to find success within the comics industry, these methods included classical approaches such as periodical comics and newspaper strips as well as the more contemporary avenues such as self-publishing & web-comics. To gain a solid understanding and context of the commercial aspect of the business, first the study reviews the history of the comics industry. This is followed by an analysis of the definition and essential components of the comic book, to achieve a better understanding of the structure and classification of comics and, therefore, their intrinsic value as a product. The rise of the digital revolution, recent developments in technologies and web2.0 have not only contributed to expanding areas of production, distribution and fandom recognition, but also to implement innovative ideas and projects. This has led to the expansion of both profitable potentials and perilous pitfalls. To analyse the implications of these new means of creation and distribution, themes such as Communities, Pitfalls of the Internet Age and Crowdfunding have been explored.

In this study, seven comic creators who have experienced varying levels of industry success engaged in interviews about how they view the comic industry, their own work and possible paths to success. From the data gathered, recommended practical strategies for success have been produced whilst the theoretical importance of fandom, gatekeepers and definitions and types of success are all carefully examined. The study concludes that to be a success, the most important factor is creating the work in the first place, with commitment and perseverance being fundamental. Producing the work via any of the multiple avenues available allows fans, other creatives, and publishers the opportunity to see your work and provides the opportunity to achieve success.

1. Introduction

The modern comics industry is a multifaceted media field encompassing a broad range of genres and audiences. Recent technology has resulted in many vicissitudes to comic book consumption, distribution and production. Serving as a contemporary communication vanguard, comics reflect today's platform of expression by combining practical artistry with digital technology and the internet. As Ndalianis notes, given the opportunities presented by these platforms, 'it is easy to see why the presence of comics is even more visible in these early days of the twenty- first century' (Ndalianis, 2011, p.115). Witnessing the progression of this important transmuting industry first-hand, this study investigates the multiple evolving and burgeoning avenues of publishing within the comic industry.

Modern academic literature on comics offers a thorough exploration of the following: comic narrative, structure, style, history of comics, how to read comics, how to draw comics and social commentaries. Contributions to the field of Comics Studies come from both practitioners, such as Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993), and academics, such as Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (1999). These significant contributions provide a context to comprehend and scrutinise the comic genre. It is also noticeable that modern academic literature on comics encounter inadequate analyses, examination, or strategies in the following areas: the creator's pathway to print, policies for successful job procurement, digital production, self-published comic distribution logistics, the effects of technology on the industry, and revenue streams in the digital industry.

Significantly, due to the fast-progressing nature of technology, previous academic literature containing a cohesive emphasis on technology within the industry has swiftly become archaic. An example of this is Mcloud's *Reinventing Comics: How Imagination and Technology Are Revolutionizing an Art Form* (2007). A book, perhaps considered forwarded thinking in 2007, was written before industrial advances such as the smartphone and tablets. The evolving technological branch of comics solicits continual up-to-date literature. Addressing the current limitations in academic comic literature my thesis explores successful routes as a self-publisher in the digital world, the evolving position of artist and creator's pathway to print, the effects of technology on the industry, routes to success, fan culture, and a holistic examination of entry to the contemporary comics market. A comprehensive exploration of this understudied area will be beneficial to the field of comics studies, comics creators and aspiring artists wanting to enter the genre.

This thesis uses autobiographical and intimate perspectives of practicing artists and comics creators as an anchor point. Numerous semi-structured interviews of comics practitioners were conducted, these interviews established the creator's motivations and strategies in publishing their work. This method of enquiry contrasts with many peer's research in this field, which incline toward textual analysis and historicity. I would suggest that to effusively explore the tensions and complexities of comic books publishing, it is necessary to engage the authors in direct dialogue. This thesis shines a spotlight on what success within the industry in the past and present may look like and avenues that a creator may explore to achieve this by engaging in meaningful dialogue with the comic creators themselves. The comics industry contains a wealth of stories and genres. Comics are being written to tell stories that touch on all aspects of life from graphic journalism such as Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993), to heart breaking and harrowing autobiographies such as Debbie Drechsler's

*Daddy's Girl (*1999). This further demonstrates the necessity of creator-led interviews as well as discussions on the form of Comics.

A deeper exploration of comics form is considered in the first chapter, defining what comics are, as well as have been, and where comics may end up. When defining what comics are, it is important to define all identifiable features. This categorisation is important in establishing a regulatory benchmark throughout the thesis as well as in the context of new digital platforms and technological derivatives. An example of this is recognising that motion comics are a technological evolution of the comics genre and can therefore no longer be defined exclusively as comics anymore. In motion comics, existing 2D comics are developed into moving animations. Motion comics are the emergent relationship between comics books, animation and new forms of digital entertainment and distribution. Motion comics utilise much of the comics components and aesthetics in order to work, this includes narrative and the original 'static' artwork from a comic book. These artwork panels are digitally edited via software such as Adobe's After Effects and this expansion on the artwork creates an animated style like paper-cut animation (Smith, 2015). Companies like Madefire and Electricomics bridge the gap between comics and animation by, as Madefire state on their website, 'transforming static comics into interactive experiences' (Madefire, 2016). So, when one asks are motion comics really comics? The answer is debatable and offers a large area for discussion. To limit the potentially limitless scope of the thesis and recognising the hybrid nature of motion comics, I will not include motion comics within this investigation. Instead, the practices that will be discussed are comics in the form of the graphic novel, ecomics and webcomics.

Having looked at the existing definitions of what makes a comic, I will present a brief history of comics. This will focus predominantly on the comic book ages that are associated with the American superhero comics. I acknowledge that the comics industry is far greater and richer than just the American industry and its remarkably successful superhero genre, but for this thesis the research will focus mainly on the manifestations of this region. The possible scope for research on an industry that is over a hundred years old and takes place across the globe is far too vast for a thesis of this size. There is an argument for the inclusion for comics from the French-Belgian, *Bande dessinée*. Comics of real importance are also being created in Asia, India and Central Europe. Again, given the spatial limitations of this thesis, further time spent on these regions would only detract from what is already a large topic and has therefore been deemed outside of the scope of this research. In keeping with the theme of success within the industry, I shall instead look solely at the American/UK highest earning comic revenues and content.

With the definitions, geographies and a brief history established, I next analyse the effects that web 2.0 has had on the comics industry. There are currently multiple avenues available for publishing a comic. Creatives are no longer exclusively limited to confinements such as submitting work to publishers, relying on editorial favour and commission. In the past couple of decades opportunities such as self-publishing has arisen utilising platforms such as blogs, social media, affordable home/remote comic self-printing mechanisms and the zine. As the form of the comic now transcends from not only the physical and tactile object to that of data on screen, so has the mode of distribution. The web 2.0 options offer creators a more accessible delivery method to reach their intended and hopeful readership but the question still applies: does this allow for greater success or weaken the well-trodden pathway to comic financial success and readership. Despite the web 2.0 possibilities it also incurs its own obstacles; not all comic readers have taken to the digital

format, many remain loyal to the collectable paper-based product. It is therefore important to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of both options to fully appreciate and understand why a creative selects the avenue of publishing that they do.

To facilitate this analysis, the thesis explores five case studies that have experienced some form of 'success' within the comics industry. The selected comic creators are Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (*Superman*), Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), Mark Millar (*Kick-Ass, The Kingsman, Wanted*), Randall Monroe (*XKCD*), Noelle Stevenson (*Nimona, Lumberjanes*), Gail Simone (*Birds of Prey, Secret Six, Batgirl*) and Richard C. Meyer (*Jawbreakers*). Whilst the scope of this selection is far from comprehensive, it does encompass a wide methodology of creating comic success. Starting with *Superman* in 1938 and culminating with a look at Gail Simone and Richard C. Meyer in 2018 these case studies demonstrate the shifting sands of the comics industry over the years and how these creators have utilized new comic forms and technologies to find success.

Throughout this thesis the term 'success' is used often, its significance and measurement can be defined differently for those that seek it. Success can be qualified by multiple factors, e.g. profit, market share, fandom, film rights or critical acclaim. A comics creator making their first comic will have different career aspirations and ideas on what defines a successful comic in comparison to a creator with a long history in the industry. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and reflect upon the individual achievements of each creator rather than predetermining a benchmark for success.

The semi-structured interviews with the comics creators offered valuable insights into the exploration of considered success. It was a deliberate process of selection to interview practitioners

at all stages of a comics creator's career. For example, one interviewee is trying to break into the industry Ben McCloud, while Tom Burgess is producing comics on differing formats. Simon Hanselman is receiving significant contemporary notoriety and exposure and David Lloyd has had a long and well- established career. This wide gamut of differing experiences proves beneficial to the research as creatives working on different platforms of comics, e.g. paper, digital and   webcomics offer differing insights and experiences. As a result, the interview content has allowed me to draw on a rich and invaluable wealth of data for the final discussions on how one may find success in the comics industry. The findings from these primary interviews and any secondary resources will be introduced in section five of the thesis. These findings will be categorised into key topics of interest. It was considered whether fans should be interviewed or polled to get their opinion on topics such as: preferred genres, reading formats, marketing stratagems that worked, did not work, and purchasing bias. One fan interview took place, it was noticeable that the fan demonstrated limited readership and viewpoint of the industry. It was decided that the attention of the thesis was better placed on the creators rather than the readership.

The title of my thesis makes reference to the seminal publication *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* by Stan Lee and John Buscema. The volume was devised for aspiring artists and writers, to demonstrate proven routes of success for drawing and creating comics books. First published in 1978 by Marvel Fireside Books, the book has since been regularly reprinted. *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* has produced a sizeable cohort of artists who believe it is "one of the best instruction books on creating comics ever produced" (Hamilton, 1978, p. 12). However, in today's comics climate, a once ground-breaking chef-d'oeuvre can seem almost antiquated.

It used to be that comics books and their readers were not taken seriously. One of America's most respected media analysts, Henry Jenkins, discusses in the book, *Critical Approaches to Comics,* his childhood and how reading comics was back in his youth:

> Even as a child, I knew that reading comics demonstrated a thorough lack of discipline-it was something I did in the summer or at home, sick in bed. In a world before specialized comics shops pulled (reserved) your comics for you, my generation would grab whatever was available to us on the spin rack at the local drug store- there was not yet a canon (fan or academic) to tell us what we were supposed to read. We read for no purpose other than pleasure-there was no method to how we were supposed to read. Indeed, many adults were there to remind us what a monumental waste of time all this was-there was nothing like Publish or Perish pushing us to read more comics we read in secret-under covers by flashlight hidden in a textbook in class-with the knowledge that there was something vaguely oppositional about our practices. You didn't stand up in front of the classroom and do a book report on what you'd read, let alone frame a scholarly lecture or essay (Smith and Duncan, 2012, p. 286).

Over the last two decades, the comics industry has significantly changed. Not only has there been a proliferation in commercial success with comics book superheroes adapted into high grossing blockbuster movies, we now view graphic novels as volumes of work that hold integrity, social commentary and many editions are being discussed in classrooms at a scholarly level. Dundee University has introduced comics studies into its curriculum. There is now a PhD thesis that has been published and released to the masses in the form of a comic (Sousanis, *Unflattening*, 2015). However, within academia, it is evident that achieving comics success and its various publishing avenues has so far not been captured as a true reflection of the evolution of today's market.

The current industry monopoly of Marvel and DC, whose working practice involves hiring a relatively limited few for maximum sales, underlines the importance of identifying other routes to comics industry success. Practically speaking, how does the new generation of comics creators make a successful career in today's current landscape? I hypothesize that a multi-stranded approach is necessary. Unlike the old vanguard of previous generations, where employees for a comic publication would predominantly all work together in the same office to produce a comic that had a distinctive house style. The rise of the internet has shrunk the world, signifying the demise of geographical limitations. Competition is now global and brutal. Conversely, the upside to this situation is worldwide audience expansion. Fandom is also now global and limitless. It is also interesting to observe that previously being part of a local publishing company was a sure-fire route to comics book achievement; however, this classical passage is no longer the sole path. I that advances in software, publishing and the internet are offering previously unseen opportunities in self-promotion and sales. Comics creators are now required to wear multiple professional hats within their practice, as not only artist, but agent, publisher, distributer and promoter. All play equal roles in procuring and evolving a successful career in the comics industry. The advantages of this 'one-man-band' are both autonomy, expressive freedom and self-sufficiency. The disadvantages are the workload, commitment and necessity to excel in all areas with little or no training other than in art and no gatekeeper to regulate the quality of work produced. This, I hypothesise, can create a disagreeable workload strain, for example: a comics creator may have produced a robust highly commercial comic, but is a promotion and distribution dullard, with little web design skills and limited insights into getting a strong comics book exposed to the general paying public. For the purposes of this thesis, I intend to investigate themes of success within contemporary work practice, alongside practical and theoretical solutions for success in the comics industry.

2.Exploration of Form

This chapter explores the definition of comics before delineating the role of technology in a historical survey of comic books. This leads to a discussion of how emergent technologies influence the future direction of the industry. The chapter will also highlight the primacy of the superhero genre in comic books and outline the importance of this for my research.

2.1 Defining a Comic

Across the world, comics are known by many different names - *Funnies, bande dessinee, fumetti, historieta* and *manga*. When investigating the meaning of these words it aptly demonstrates the difficulties in defining what a comic truly is. The Anglo terms *comics* and *funnies* relate to the genre's historical origins, while the *bande dessinee* translates to 'drawn strip' which, interestingly, highlights a similar tone to Eisner's 'Sequential art'; *fumetti*, means little puffs of smoke - representative of speech bubbles; *historieta* meaning 'little story' accentuates the narrative characteristic; whilst *manga* was a term by Katsushika Hokusai, referring to his speedily drawn caricatures, emphasizing its distinction from classical calligraphy and fine art (Labio, 2011). Establishing the subject of study – comics – is a taxing yet mandatory rung to climb in the progress of any academic thesis investigation. A succinct description of the medium could be as follows: comics typically consist of organized printed words and pictures in a context that is constrained within a small space, newspaper strip of four panels or 20 pages in a floppy comic book. However, within these constraints, this unique form of storytelling allows for much elasticity in the handling of meaning, themes, ideology and narrative (McAllister, Sewell Jr and Gordon, 2001). Conversely, I am aware that this explanation is in no way definitive of what a 'comic' is. In fact, academics over the years have struggled to pin down a decisive taxonomy of a comic. David Kunzle defines the

comics strip as simply 'a sequence of separate images' with 'a preponderance of image over text' (Kunzle, 1973). This definition is a point in the right direction however, problematic categories quickly occur, e.g. artists and creators have produced text-heavy comics such as *A.D. After Death* (2007) by Scott Snyder and Jeff Lemire, whilst Norwegian cartoonist Jason, real name John Arne Sæterøy produces comics strips devoid of any prose, for example *Shhhh* (2008).

Perhaps a better overview is presented by Will Eisner when he states that comics have now 'achieved a successful crossbreeding of illustration and prose, the reader is required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretative skills' (Eisner, 1985, p. 8). Eisner coined the term 'sequential art' to define comics. And whilst this term helps to reinforce the artistic elements*,* Meskin, (2007) refers to this term as too thin to really define comics. If multiple photos were laid out in a sequence this does not make them a comics strip. Scott McCloud's comic on comics, *Understanding Comics* defines comics as 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequences, intended to convey information and or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.' With that viewpoint is an Ikea instruction manual, the Bayeux Tapestry or an Aeroplane Safety Procedure Sheet 'in case of an emergency'- all correctly classified as Comics? McCloud would argue, *yes*. (McCloud, 1994, pp.12-13). Which further extends the debate: when does a comic become a graphic novel?

> A graphic novel is a comic. "Graphic novel" is just a word for a certain
> format of comic. It was invented mainly as a marketing term to make
> comics more palatable to people who have a prejudice against them.
> People are calling basically anything bound with a spine a graphic novel—
> short story collections, strip collections, nonfiction, memoir, it doesn't
> matter if it's novelistic in any sense. "Graphic narrative" is another
> highfalutin term for comics, but it's better because it doesn't refer to a

specific format. So, I call myself a cartoonist or a comics artist and never a graphic novelist, because it's just more general and what I do is broader than La Perdida. (Goerlitz, 2008, p. 19).

To cogitate further on classifications, a glance at picture books muddies the discussion further. In academic reference, the definition of both picture book and comics regularly overlap ideas of narration, sequences and page turning have played an important role of theorizing both genres (Sanders, 2013). An example of this comes from the celebrated author Raymond Briggs with his books for children and adults alike, with titles including *Father Christmas* (1973), *Fungus the Bogeyman* (1977), *The Snowman* (1978), *When the Wind Blows* (1982)*, and Ethel & Ernest* (1998), which are often labelled as picture books instead of comics or graphic novels. When revisiting Scott McCloud's earlier definition of a comic, '[a comic] has juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequences, intended to convey information and or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.' This leads to the question- can a piece of work be both a picture book and a comic? Or perhaps one might say it is the point of distribution that determines the classification. "I bought this in a children's book shop therefore it is a picture book" or "I bought this in a comic store therefore it is a comic?" Nevertheless, this model may not fit as you can buy comics in a children's bookshop. Maybe, as Meskin (2009) concludes, we are better served to celebrate the medium's vast artistic possibilities than to tether boundaries and limitations, in an attempt to better define – comics.

Definitions aside, there are four classical ways to produce a comic.

1. A comic printed on to paper in the mode of a 'floppy' single issue release. Single serving instalments of a larger story. They are numbered to indicate where in the story each issue stands. These are your generic new stand 'comics'. The story usually begins with issue 1. These printed

comics are tangible objects, an asset that digital and online comics cannot deliver. There can be limited edition runs, signed comics and prized front covers by esteemed artists. It is a collectable item. With monetary worth ranging from free to priceless.

2. The term graphic novel is used to classify a format, for example, a bound book of comics whether in soft or hard cover, in contrast to the old-fashioned stapled magazine… A comics book narrative that is equivalent in form and dimensions to the prose novel (Campbell, 2007, p.13). Typically, they either contain 12 issues of an ongoing comic or a standalone original story. Having said that, there are graphic novels that are experimental in size and shape. Chris Ware's *Building Stories* (2012) and Woodrow Phoenix's *She Lives* (2014) are two examples of what can be achieved when a creator experiments with the form of the book. Publishers sometimes release special editions of previously published works such as DC Absolute Editions and IDW Artist Editions.

3. eComics are regarded as print comics adapted to electronic data for screen viewing. Typically, the work has already been created for print so is easily uploaded and converted at the minimum of cost. Archiving existing comics books, as in the cases of scans or scanlations. Digital Comics are read on any device, from smartphones to televisions. ecomics – irrespective of their source – are delivered and received by websites such as ComiXology and their reading tool Guided View (Martin, 2017). Some ecomics can have original content but are often reproduced printed comics. Recently, some of the larger publishing companies have been creating digital 'first' comics. Some include ground-breaking enhanced viewing experiences. One company creating these new digital revelations is the Research and Development funded company, Electricomics. They are producing high quality experimental digital comics and allow the reader to create their own digital comics using the Electricomics Generator.

4. Webcomics, produced initially for and enjoyed principally online via websites, blogs or social media (Kukkonen, 2014). A good example of a webcomic is Randall Munroe's *XKCD* strip - pulling in 70 million hits per month since October 2007. Typically, Webcomics are free to read 'comics that are distributed through the internet by an independent creator with no corporate sponsorship' (Fenty et al, 2005). Unlike printed and digital, the sales revenue is minimal to non-existent and relies on either merchandising, advertising or subscription. Many of these online comics are found on blogs, social networks or comics specific sites. They are much more creator owned then the printed and digital as often the role of the publisher has been removed. Both ecomics and webcomics can be viewed on a computer screen, on a tablet or smart phone. Each device altering our way of reading the story. The asset of these forms of comics over Print are their cheapness and portability. For this essay it is important to note that they are not the same and should not be considered the same.

2.1.2 A Brief History of Comics

The story of the superhero is intrinsically linked with comics, to the point that those unfamiliar to the medium can be forgiven for considering that it is the only genre articulated in the comics industry. Arguably this singular presumption of superhero saturated comics is appropriate from a monetary point of view. Below is a brief history of the multiple Ages of Comics and, from the Golden Age to now, it is evident that maximum sales & profitably has occurred utilising the superhero archetype. This social presumption of a niche comics audience extends even beyond the sole superhero narrative to the further assumption that comics are exclusively for boys and young men. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to note that this modern perception of a sole

male teen audience is waning in accuracy. In the last 30 years a renaissance of creativity, talent and publishers have worked hard to break the paradigm.

Contemporary readers acquainted to the comics landscape will recognise that modern Comics offer a wide variety of narratives, from books about girls on mystical camping trips in the series *Lumberjanes* (2014) to autobiographical publications such as *My Friend Dahmer* (2012). Many modern comics cater for all demographics, young to old, of any gender, educational to adventure, thrilling to morose, low-cost zines to expensive library editions. Over the last 20 years, the industry has noticeably broadened both its appeal and the scope of representation. More female creators are making comics, Noelle Stevenson and Gail Simone as examples, both of whom will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. This expansion of both male and female creators has resulted in the readership of comics presently being a much more even split between the sexes. Brett Schenker, a reporter for comicsbeat.com, has this to say on the upward trend of female comics fans:

> In February 2014, the Facebook universe of self-identified comic fans grew to a new high of over 24 million fans in the United States. Of that 24 million, women account for 46.67% of that population. Since I've been tracking these stats, that's the highest percentage of women recorded (Schenker, 2014).

But the revolution of content and audience goes further. Expanding genres, pioneering publishers and multi-voiced creatives have combined with emerging technologies and digital readership to allow inventive non-linear routes for success creating greater opportunities for stories to be told and seen. The digital revolution has opened-up readership, accessibility and visibility. But before we look at how the digital revolution has emerged from these contemporary technologies; it is important to first gain a greater understanding of the history of comics within the context of

'success'. The exploration of comics roots provides a vital foundation upon which to explore historical financial failures and triumphs.

1895 - 1938 is categorised as the Platinum Age. It is historically accepted that the first emergence of distributed syndicated strips appeared in American newspapers. Richard F Outcalt created a character named the *Yellow Kid*. This appearance in New York newspapers in 1894 is what many consider as the birth of the classical comics strip. With the phrase 'comic book' appearing for the first time on the back cover. The *Yellow Kid* strip initially began as black and white with speech bubbles of full dialogue. The strip's first colour printing was on 5 May 1895. "It was the first to demonstrate that a comics strip could be merchandised profitably" (Olson, 1993). Successive comics strip collation included reprints of *Mutt & Jeff*, *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Buster Brown*, and *Happy Hooligan*.

Due to their comical narrative and humorous themes, these quickly became known as 'funnies'. The first printed comics books reinforced this trend with titles such as *Famous Funnies, Funnies on Parade & The Funnies (Wright, 1968).* As time passed, despite releasing more serious subject storylines, the use of the word 'comic' stuck. Later, this word would encompass the whole range of graphic narrative expression from newspaper strips to comics books (Sabin, 1993).

In 1929 Dell Publishing House produced an experimental weekly comic that was distributed to newsstands. Due to poor sales, after only 36 issues the publication ceased. However, this venture inspired other publishing entrepreneurs to investigate comics magazines and their commercial potential (Wright, 2003). By the 1930s comics book sales became significant. Success was found in adventure themes, grittier storylines, realistic drawing styles and smaller publishing formats. A

good example is Chester Gould's *Dick Tracey* launched in October 1931 by the Chicago Tribune

Syndicate. Chester Gould's furious, terrifying adaptation of unsentimental pulps and racketeer

movies produced immediate success and heralded the comics readers' appetite for comics to turn

darker (Jones, 2004, p.75).

Storylines were able to organically expand as publishing formats transformed from a collection of

reprinted daily newspaper strips to original content in 16 to 32-page colour booklets. During this

period, another significant catalyst of genre definition was the collaboration of Jerry Siegel and Joe

Shuster creating the hugely popular Superman, and with him the birth of comics most iconic

character: the superhero (Wright, 1968). From the viewpoint of success within comics, it is difficult

to unearth a more publicly recognised and celebrated character than Superman. Nonetheless, it is

interesting to note that the characters commercial potential was not immediately spotted by the

US comics publishers: "It took us six years to sell Superman. Just about every comics editor in the

country turned us down" (Jerry Siegal quoted in Jones, 2004). Later in the thesis, an in-depth

exploration of Superman will further examine the paradox of defining success within the comics

industry.

The debut of the first issue of Superman in *Action Comics* in June 1938 heralded the dawn of the

Golden Age. In three printings of the first issue to feature Superman, 900,000 copies were sold

(Jones, 2004, p.155). The Golden Age of Comics Books began in June. Another mighty commercial

success, Bob Kane and Bill Fingers' Batman debuted less than 12 months later in *Detective Comics*

#27. "Criminals are a superstitious and cowardly lot. So, my disguise must be able to strike terror

into their hearts. I must be a creature of the night, black terrible... a..." "As if in answer a huge bat

flies through the window" "A bat! That's it. It's an omen. I shall become a BAT" (Fingers, B. Kane, B. Detective Comics No. 27, Issue 6).

In October 1939 and 1940, Marvel Comics' forerunner, Timely Publications, realised the successful cash cow of the superhero genre. Over this period, they published a plethora of significant superhero characters, including the Human Torch, Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner, Captain Marvel, Flash, Green Lantern, Captain America, who fought alongside (at least in the marketplace) DC's Wonder Woman, Superman, Batman, and a host of 'lesser' heroes. The superhero strategy paid off, and the time period of 1938 to mid-1940s denotes the greatest era of North American comics book sales. In today's modern marketplace, the monthly sales for a publisher linger at around 6-7 million copies (Comichron, 2018). In comparison: in early 1942 Publishers Weekly and Business Week both reported that some 15 million comics books were sold each month. Moreover, publishers assumed a generous "pass-along value" of five readers per comics book. By December 1942, monthly comics book sales had climbed to 25 million copies (Wright, 2003, p.30).

This increase in sales was bolstered by a propaganda push from the U.S. government, to boost public support and aid morale, as highlighted by Ian Gordon in his article, *The Moral World of Superman and the American War in Vietnam:*

> At first the stories in these Sunday pages followed much the same format as in the comic books. But, beginning in August 1943, Superman began to help soldiers at the front through numerous acts that fell short of joining the fighting. To be sure, these were the sorts of acts of charity to which Eco points. For instance in the 31 October comic strip he helps motivate a town to send mail to a lonely hometown solider. Such an act of charity had a double edge: helping the soldier in his emotional need for connection, but also helping the war effort by improving morale. And indeed it is the

delivery of this mail in the 14 November, 1943 strip that inspires the two soldiers to take on 300 Japanese in the 21 November, 1943 strip (Gordon, 2015).

In the 1930s and 40s the superhero genre accompanied the 'superhuman' war effort. With the war won and the homecoming of the troops, the reappearance of normality in post-war America attributed to the sale of superhero comics books plummeting with numerous titles ceasing their publication. Across the mid-1950s, the superhero vacuum swiftly filled with storylines of more sombre themes such as horror, crime, romance and Western. Interestingly, comics books based on the main three characters; Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman continued to engage modest readership.

The Silver Age would begin in 1956 and end in 1970. The publication of the bestselling book *Seduction of the Innocent* 1954, written by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, argued that comic books of all genres were perverting the minds of American Youth. One issue that Wertham argued (amongst many) was that readers only remembered fragments rather than the whole story, so having the criminals caught at the end served little purpose. Demonstrating this point, he asked a boy to summarise the stories he liked reading best. The boy said "They have a lot of girls in them. There is a lot of fighting in them. There are men and women fighting. Sometimes they kill the girls, they strangle them, shoot them. Sometimes they poison them. In the magazine Jumbo, they often stab them. The girl doesn't do the stabbing very often, she gets stabbed more often" (Wertham, 1955). Members of Congress were so distressed by the book's observations that they called Wertham to testify before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency.

Unfortunately, the defence of comics was dispersed and principally incompetent. Henry Schultz was the man in charge of defending the comics industry, as director of the Association of Comics Magazines Publishers and leader of the publishers' trade association, he struggled to combat the damning publicity generated. From the outset, he was ill-organised, underfunded and received inadequate industry support (Nyberg, 1998, p98). Just as the Motion Picture Association of America was created to avert government interfering in film production, to resolve the issue, the comics publishing industry recognised growing public criticism, and produced the Comics Code Authority in order to self-regulate their industry. The Code set out multiple requirements for comics books, covering numerous themes, such as dialogue, religion, costume, marriage and sex. Here are some examples:

• All scenes of horror, excessive bloodshed, gory or gruesome crimes, depravity, lust, sadism, masochism shall not be permitted.

• Divorce shall not be treated humorously nor represented as desirable.

• Illicit sex relations are not portrayed, and sexual abnormalities are unacceptable.

• Vampires and vampirism, ghouls, cannibalism and werewolfism are prohibited.

• Profanity, obscenity, smut, vulgarity, or words or symbols which have acquired undesirable meanings…are prohibited

(The Comics Code of 1954 – Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, 2021)

Understandably, the Code of Conduct resulted in many cancelations of horror, crime, fantasy and romance titles which violated the code. Searching for appropriate material, comics book companies started publishing comic series starring forgotten superheroes from the Golden Age. They

overhauled remaining superheroes and fashioned new superhero characters. During this era, DC

comics reinvented numerous long-lasting characters that, 60 years later, remain profitable, with

franchise spin offs, movies and TV series – characters such as The Flash, and Green Lantern. In

point, the return of Flash, in Showcase #4 (October 1956) defines the commencement of the Silver

Age, when superhero comic books re-experienced significant commercial success. It is fascinating to

note that due to the sizeable shift in acceptable story writing, comics books witnessed a substantial

alteration from murky and supernatural themes to farcical plots and silly jokes.

> But more importantly, releasing the entire Batman series on DVD for fans
> old and new to check out has re-sparked an interest in "camp material."
> Intentional camp, specifically, is a style in which whatever you're
> watching/reading/listening to acknowledges that the universe it resides in
> is a parody and is totally serious about being a parody (Sheehan, 2015).

In 1966 Batman and Robin combined forces with comedian Jerry Lewis to fight the Joker in *Jerry*

Lewis #97 (December 1966) and the *Batman* television series in the mid-1960s is regarded by many

as having a 'high degree of camp' - the complete antithesis to the modern-day brooding Dark

knight.

With Atlas Comics re-emerging as Marvel Comics, more fan favourite superheroes like Spider-Man

were born. Despite the lack of unanimous consensus, some (Ryall and Tipton, 2009) believe that the

death of Spider-Man's girlfriend Gwen Stacey in *Amazing Spider-Man* #121 in 1973 heralded the

end of the Silver Age. This was the first occurrence of a significant character being violently killed

off. A story line that metaphorically mirrored the death of sweet innocent Silver Age and

foreshadowed the violence and grime to follow in the Bronze Age (Russell,2013, p.124).

The 1970s to mid 1980s is known as the Bronze Age. Unlike the previous eras, there was arguably no single, defining event that kicks off the Bronze era, but it marked the finale of numerous important comics creators retiring and shepherded in a fresh new generation that turned their individual and more nuanced gaze on the superhero genre. The Comics Code's 1971 revision offered more lenient restrictions enabling comics to write again about more mature issues such as drugs, alcoholism and violence (Russell,2013, p.124). Many mainstream industry creators were eager to shake off the public stigma that conventional comics books were only synonymous to light-hearted superhero frivolity. Various writers were enthusiastic to demonstrate that comics contained compelling storylines for older readers. 'Comic book makers interpreted declining sales as a signal that superheroes ought to spend less time proselytizing and more time punching' (Wright, 2001, p.245).

Historically, the Bronze Age is considered as the first mainstream endeavour to produce comics books containing realism and adult issues (themes that would govern the genre of later seen The Dark Age Era). Explicit eroticism appeared: necklines dipped, and hemlines hitched upwards on ladies or exaggerated breastplates starting to appear, e.g. Red Sonja. Masculine characters like Conan the Barbarian regularly appeared topless and shirt free. Religion and questions of faith, Native American land rights, pollution, overcrowding and women's equality (Morrison, 2011, p.152) also began appearing as suitable topics for conversation along with the emergence of non-white superheroes. Noticeable ethnic representation such as Cyborg of the Teen Titans and Storm of the X-Men were revolutionary characters created to represent a multicultural world.

More female superheroes appeared and established the superheroine as more self- assured, positive and self-regulating character type, noticeably engaging in more dynamic and prominent

storylines than their predecessors in the Silver Age. A good example can be seen in the evolution of Invisible Girl transforming into The Invisible Woman and taking over as leader of the Fantastic Four, while Hawkgirl similarly blossomed as Hawkwoman and was welcomed into the Justice League. Conceivably this fresh emphasis on diversity explicates X-Men's celebrated success under writer Chris Claremont and artists Dave Cockrum and John Byrne after previously experiencing relatively mediocre sales during the Silver Age. Under the new creative team, the core X- Men team became multinational and culturally diverse while the stories used ideas of anti-mutant discrimination to push plotlines (Wright, 2001, p.262). These comic book themes aided as opportune metaphors for modern issues like homophobia and racism.

Interestingly, not only themes and subject matter but also the format of comics experienced changes and development. With the easing of stringent restrictions from The Comics Code, comics creators were willing to experiment again with how the comics format could be published. The first "graphic novels" showed up, and unlike comic books, graphic novels do not have a standard publication, often ranging in size and orientation with beautifully designed hardcover editions (Posterma, 2013, p.136). Although not the first to produce a graphic novel, Will Eisner was the first to coin the term 'graphic novel' with the publication of *A Contract with God* (1978) and further titles released every year long into the eighties.

With the birth of new ideas, characters and format, DC produced a boom of over 50 new titles offering larger comics with additional pages devoted to story. This period in comics history coined the phrase the "DC Explosion". This was a marketing term used by DC Comics to introduce a number of new titles (DC Comics, 2020). Regrettably, by 1978 many titles were subsequently cancelled in the infamous "DC Implosion". With the commercial catastrophe, fresh DC management changed the

publishing agenda to realistic efforts like the "limited series" publishing concept, which permitted comics to convey stories in deliberately short runs rather than unsustainable never-ending issues.

Up until now, comics were distributed through the 'Main Periodical Distribution System'. With this system, comics were shipped directly to newsstands, select drug stores and candy shops. At the same time the new comics were delivered, the old comics would be taken away. This set up offered a reliable, yet limited sales opportunities. This then changed with arrival of the Comics Book Direct Market- for several years, the underground comics scene had grown in strength. These comics were not obtainable in the same spaces as the mainstream comics, they were marginalised, instead sold in specialist shops. Across the U.S. specialised comics stores began to appear. Not long after this time, Phil Seuling a comics convention organizer and comics dealer set up the Direct Market through his company, Seagate (Wolk, 2007, p.41). The unique variances of Seuling's distribution scheme allowed merchants to keep hold of the

old copies of comics rather then return them, allowing retailers opportunities to sell the old back issues of the comics. Knowing books would not be returned, Seuling offered large discounts on book stock ordered to increase volume on deliveries. With this new system in place, comics shops could offer back issues and other positive customer attributes such as speedier in-store book arrival, and improved condition of books and memorabilia. With the emergence of the Direct Market, publishers were given the opportunity to dodge the comics code completely and indulge in the shocking graphic subject matter that had not been present in comics books since the early 1950s (Wright,2001, p277) comics books were getting increasingly 'adult'.

THE DARK AGE – THE MODERN AGE. 1985 onwards. A prime example of this emerging well-used theme of 'darker and grittier' is Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* published in 1986 in a four-part story with Bruce Wayne as an acrimonious, aging vigilante combating a dictatorial Superman in a hellish Gotham City. This hard- edged, nasty twist on two beloved superheroes became an instant best seller (Jones, 2004, p.330). With the new generation of 'modern age' writers such as Frank Miller and Alan Moore, comics books ushered in a palpable shift in story arcs and character development with more psychologically complex characters, twisting plots and anti-heroes. This is evident in seminal publications such as *Watchmen* (1986), and *Maus* (1986) Along with the *Dark Knight Returns* (1986), all three gained wide critical acclaim, not just within the comics world but in the larger global publishing audience e.g. *Maus* won the Pulitzer Prize and Watchmen received a place in the Times Magazines list of '100 greatest English Novels of the 20th Century.' (Time.com, 2010)

> The superhero gained its status as an indispensable constituent of mass-market Hollywood inspiration in 1989, when Tim Burton's movie *Batman* broke every box-office record. A fresh superhero boom began. Just like the boom at the eve of World War 2, it built fortune and fame for the industry creators who could move quickly to exploit it (Jones, 2004, p.331).

Creator's rights and ownership became a burning point of friction for many mainstream creators. When Marvel rejected the idea of its artists having any control or rights over their work, a group of top artists such as Jim Lee and Todd McFarlane (among others) quit and formed their own company called Image Comics (Wolk, 2007, p.45).

Academic judgment is divided as to whether the Dark Age existed at all (some ignore the category merging 1985 onwards as one simpler classification of *Modern Age*). That said, the industry creators

who do use the Dark Age as an era state that the Dark Age ended and Modern began around the mid-to-late 1990s. Which coincides with the 'great comics crash'. Reasons for the crash can be taken from the following factors: the distribution by the 1990s comic distributor Diamond and Capital City (the two main companies) significantly diminished their ordering quota. (McAllister, M.P., 2001 p25). Meanwhile, the comics collector boom was occurring. Early edition comics had grown valuable, mainly due to their rare existence and only a few surviving, purchasers became aware that new comics might also become valuable in years to come, and this promise of future lucrative gains began to drive the market. The comic book industry encouraged the boom. Copious marketing manoeuvres aimed specifically at the collector's market started to emerge. These included: blatant relaunching of well-established series with new #1 issues. Issues printed with several variant covers encouraging collectors to buy numerous copies of the same comic. Issues sold pre-bagged in plastic, encouraging the reader to purchase the issue twice: keep one untouched and pristine in the bag, whilst the other is opened and read. Lastly, huge publicity driven "shake-up" plots were used to create sales spikes. An excellent example of this was the *Death of Superman* (1992) narrative which produced a colossal rise in comics book investors due to its mainstream public attention…. And then led to the disaffected many when the con was finally exposed: 'he's alive!'

Whereas certain older comics were extremely rare and therefore selling for high prices, the new "collectibles" were sold and distributed in vast numbers. Millions of people bought millions of copies making any rarity of a comic obsolete and subsequently worthless. This mass flooding of the market was amplified by Marvel, Image and DC fighting for every sale and market share by pumping out series after series (Wolk, 2007, p45). When dealers, collectors and the public comprehended this, the market crumpled. A number of small indie publishers were ruined, collapsed or bought out,

whilst only a third of all direct market comics bookstores survived the crash. However, out of the crash, one genre-busting cash-cow has grown from strength to strength – the movie genre. The Dark Age authority of grittier plots and darker movies served as the primary plot structure. A good representation of this (amongst many others) was Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy (2005-12).

That said, it is interesting to note that over the past five years, another palpable shift is developing with mainstream turning its back on the gritty and dark in search for a more positive cinematic experience. We see Marvel, successfully returning to the lighter approach with uplifting positive worlds, for example, with *Black Panther* (2018) receiving critical acclaim and breaking box office records. While audience appetites tilt more towards the funnies again, demanding comics light relief *Ant Man* (2015) and self- deprecating humour *Deadpool 1* & *2* (2016 and 18).

Films aside, over the past twenty years, with consistent developments in technologies and the internet, new avenues of comics production, publication and distribution have emerged with arguably, thousands of comics created every month. Daniel Merlin Goodbrey expands on this new avenue of publishing:

> Today, digital distribution and display is an increasingly popular mode of
> consumption for the form of comics. Portable touchscreen devices such as
> smart phones and tablet computers have provided a single platform of
> consumption for comics, film, animation and videogames. Traditional print
> comic publishers had been wary of making the leap to the web and were
> reluctant to adopt the "free content" business model established by creator-
> owned webcomics. But the prevalence of touchscreen devices and an
> increased acceptance of paying for digital content has led to a significantly
> different publishing landscape. As a result, the larger comic book publishers

have moved to embrace digital formats, both as an avenue for additional

income and as an outreach to new audiences (Goodbrey, 2017).

According to Comichron there are over 500 new comic books issues released every month. This

does not include ecomics, blog comics posts or free webcomics. The world of comics production and

distribution is expanding and diversifying. The comics creative professional, novice or fan have

growing equal access to public attention and readership and it is noticeable that all censorship is

seemingly abandoned, and all tastes are catered for. Comic books sales may be squeezed; however,

one could argue that these are potentially exhilarating times with loose paradigms of comics

definition and any previous restrictions abandoned, arguably offering (out of all the previous eras)

the greatest creative comics opportunities for exploration, development, and success.

2.3 The Digital Revolution

Extensive recognition of the internet by news media and publishers itself portends to eventually

replacing print as the chief channel for comics strips (Eisner, 2008). The emergence of the internet

has transformed global content access, community platforms and creative tools for comics

construction – allowing emergent opportunities for creatives to utilise multiple innovative methods

to achieve success. This segment of the thesis recognises some positive and negative impacts that

digital platforms may have on a comics creator's success.

2.3.1 Community

Howard Rheingold (1993) introduced the concept of virtual communities where people with alternative lifestyles could unite for public conversation, debate and discussion. Specific virtual settings can act as safe spaces for some marginalised fans: 'Brought together by their common interests in a TV program or music group, fan communities were viewed as socially "safe" spaces where individuals could celebrate culturally devalued texts without fear of social reprisals or ridicule' (Sullivan, 2013, p.189). The modern public have an instinctive need for community spirit, which Rheingold states is no longer as prevalent in the contemporary offline world. The virtual community exists outside the work and home place and are platforms where the exchange of dialogue is the main activity, the tone is usually good natured. Gender, race and geographical location have the potential to be neutralised, social and industry positions are levelled. Online communication technologies have liberated many individuals from the social and biological restrictions of location and typographical immediacy (Willson, 1997). One should note that there are discussions by scholars such as Rukmini Pande (2018) and Kristina Busse (2009) who have examined that this may not be the case and that racial and gender identity have their own complex subcultural factors to consider. However, in terms of technology alone the internet 2.0 has made it possible for anyone to make contact with anyone, despite their geographic location or professional position. This in turn allows people to meet (on a virtual platform) and have the opportunity to discuss with like- minded others who share common values, beliefs, interests or passions (Baym, 2002).

It is possible to consider that internet communities are more significant, pertinent or accurate then communities in the real world. This is because people actively decide to be in them, as opposed to membership due to place of birth or domestic location. Instead, online conversation occurs within a setting shaped by the audience (Wilson, 1997) with often one overriding theme/identity. Audiences are no longer simply consumers of media; they have become participants. Australian academic Bruns (2008) examined the concept of the user who produces and invented the term *produser* as a blend of the words producer and user. The blogger becomes author, the vlogger become director, editor and script writer. Bruns says *produsage* has four key elements:

- *Fluid hierarchy/ad-hoc meritocracy*. Where all levels of skill have the ability to contribute.

- *Unfinished artifact/continuing process*. This product in question continually evolves, grows and constructs with no finished or finalised end.

- *Open participation/communal evaluation*. Allowing a variety of people to contribute to the project.

- *Common property/individual rewards*. Content is less seen as owned by the author or produced in the traditional sense but has become more communal in nature (Bruns, 2007).

Deviant Art is a good example of a website that provides all four of these elements for its produsers. Where expert and novice artists can upload their artwork for critique, contribute to projects, and/or discuss topics, artwork or ideas with no finalised end goal in sight. Leadbeater (2008) goes further to identify another type of contributor *the professional amateur* as a person who works on a project that interests them to the point that they are motivated to spend as many hours on a task as they

would on their own day job, however without getting paid for the work on the task. However, payment can be received in the form of online community immersion and plaudits.

Feeling a sense of community is a vital factor of efficacious virtual communities. Membership, influence, integration, and emotional connection are elements that McMillan and Chavis (1986) regard as necessary components for sense of community. The comics community plays an important role for both fan and artist. As an artist's viewpoint from To Infinity Studios demonstrates:

> Comic communities can be very important when you're an indie comic creator...It's a place where you can start a thread for your project and hold yourself accountable. Sharing progress as you write a new page, get the inks done, or finish up some lettering. You can also get some feedback before ever releasing your project to the public. In some communities, you can even get some scripts edited or get some experience editing other people's scripts. Don't go at this alone. It only makes sense to find some like- minded individuals (The Importance of Comic Communities, 2017).

For artists, the virtual community can be a positive space to share and teach. *Arclight Comics* is an indie company that encourages artists to join for free, to teach, gain and share advice. Then there is the website *Comic Book Hour,* a growing community of indie creators looking for collaborators, writers and artists, whilst using tools such as forums and twitter questionnaires for feedback and valuable insights in to how to progress their career further. Again, this is a free website to join. Another website worth looking at is *Tapas*, with nearly 40,000 creators publishing their work on the site, the company aims to support the comic indie industry by helping 'storytellers publish their work, build fan communities, and earn rewards from their creative labor.' (*Tapas. About Us*)

2.3.2 Pitfalls of the Internet Age

Just as with any medium, there are pitfalls in publishing work online. Copyright issues can negate any positive professional gains. Online comics creators often extensively share their work using multiple online platforms such as personal websites, blogs and social media. This can leave their work open to being stolen or misused, resulting in countless creatives experiencing issues with online copyright law (Mansell and Steinmueller, 2013). Many creatives, and in particular webcomics creators, know that a pivotal role within their career goals is sharing content to build and expand their business. To succeed, it is necessary to push online traffic to their website, numerous social media platforms and build important ties to the comics community. The aim of this is to provide revenue through commissions, collaborations, selling advertising space, merchandise, donations or crowdfunding projects (Dowthwaite, 2014). This extensive use of sharing artwork via online technologies and sharing platforms can result in artists having their work stolen, unaccredited or misused. The implication of this is that artwork may result in a third- party receiving revenue, viewings, promotion or exposure, with no benefit to the original creator. When copyright is infringed, it is particularly hard for a comics creator to assert their rights. Existing copyright regulation initially comes across as adequate protection for independent online artists. However, it is usually not monitored or enforced, resulting in the creator shouldering the responsibility of administrating who and where their artwork is being used. The recent situation with Facebook and Cambridge Analytica highlights the global disregard for personal data. A multi-billion dollar global company held little regard for sharing and policing information without the originators' consent (Cadwalladr and Graham-Harrison, 2018). The public outrage resulted in a significant backlash and new data protection legislation rushed into place. This current scandal holds a magnifying glass up to the contemporary issue of sharing content online and consent of usage by a third party.

A positive/negative attribute of the Internet is its ability to allow the public to instantly upload and relocate content. Our generation has witnessed a global expansion of sharing information increased exponentially with the evolution of smart phones and social media. This has unfortunately resulted in a public trend of many web users being either ignorant of or choosing to discount copyright infringement. This is apparent in all sectors of the creative industry, from downloading movies and music to copying artwork and essays.

When we glance across at the comics industry, webcomics can suffer greatly, often falling prey to re-posting without attribution, attributed to the wrong person, or copying. The consequence of this inevitably results in the artist not achieving exposure or revenue. For example, Dowthwaite, Houghton and Mortier refer to an incident:

> Late in 2013 Rachel Dukes posted a blog about one of her comics that had gone viral. She actively encourages people to share her work, as long as the work is credited and unaltered. Unfortunately, this particular comic spread without attribution, which meant that someone had to actively edit the image and crop off the URL and copyright notice. She tracked the comic and found that of the (estimated) 669,905 views, only 81,595 (12 percent) were of the original, credited version. She calls these huge viewing figures "heartbreaking" (Dukes, 2013) because she will see no benefit from them, where other sites are actively profiting in both money and popularity (Dowthwaite, Houghton and Mortier, 2016, p.2).

Another barbed attribute of the internet is its global reach. Enforcing any copyright violation becomes ambivalent when country jurisdictions overlap. Dowthwaite, Houghton and Mortier give the following example to explain the situation: "Imagine an English artist, posting on an American

site with data centres in Canada, who finds that their work is being misused by a German living in Australia. How is the artist to know in simple terms which jurisdiction and what laws apply to enable the artist to take legal action for the breach?" (Dowthwaite, Houghton and Mortier, 2016, p.3). Many creators lack the financial resources to implement any legal action even if their knowledge of creators' rights is comprehensive. If any legal action were to take place, a creator seeking justice would be at a considerable disadvantage, due to the duration and cost of a lengthy court case.

Considering the limitations, the artist may experience in enforcing copyright, thankfully this is where the online community can play a pivotal role. The comics community can prove itself to be a successful tool for keeping infringements in check. When websites and people are seen to be disrespectful of the copy right laws across various social media platforms, the original creators have efficaciously asked fans to shun and vocally comment on the misuse of content. These fans are also reminded, by the creator, of the parameters for acceptable use in terms of sharing and the importance of attribution. Given that the legal option can be out of the financial reach of many independent creators, the role of the community has been key. When the law is an unrealistic option, creators find that the fans and other creatives can support each other by keeping an eye out for copyright infringements and highlighting them when they occur.

2.3.3 Crowdfunding

With the advent of the internet, independent comics artists and companies have the ability to fund creative ventures by raising capital from a quantity of people who each donate a moderately small amount. The capacity to crowdfund has become an important tool for many independent comics

creators. Sites such as Kickstarter and Patreon are used by hundreds of people each year to order to raise funds to create comics. The insert below is from an article on Kickstarter's website, discussing how successful the comics category had been in 2018.

> The Kickstarter Comics category had a massive year in 2018, with backers from around the world pledging a record $16 million to projects large and small. For nearly a decade, comics makers have been coming to Kickstarter in pursuit of creative autonomy. This sense of independence has fostered the robust community of comics lovers we see on Kickstarter today. And it keeps growing!
>
> Here's the breakdown from last year:
> - $16 million pledged to all projects, up 26% from 2017.
> - $15.3 million pledged to successfully funded projects, up 27% from 2017.
> - 1,457 projects funded, up 14% from 2017, the previous best year, and nearly triple the amount in 2012.
> - 70% funding success rate (Zhang, 2019).

Crowdfunding is an evolutionary development on crowdsourcing. Wikipedia is a chief example of crowdsourcing (Miller, 2011). Instead of employing specialized writers to study and write each encyclopaedia entry, Wikipedia utilises the collective effort of amateurs and professionals, collating millions of users to produce articles for free (Miller, 2011). To differentiate: crowdfunding platforms allow backers to contribute money in exchange for rewards whereas crowdsourcing is the sourcing of anything from a crowd.

Kickstarter is exclusively for creative projects. Within Kickstarter, there is a creator and the backers. A creator is the team or person proposing the venture. Backers are anonymous patrons who pledge

finance to join creators in bringing the project to life. No backers or creators are charged for a pledge unless it reaches its funding target. Creators are obligated to offer rewards to pledgers. There is an array of rewards available. The quality or quantity of the reward is dependent on the amount pledged. For example, a typical £20 reward is for a copy of the soft cover comic. The pledge needed can double for a hardback, even more if signed. Grander donations might get you a mention, merchandise, or even the chance to be illustrated as a character. Publications are sometimes offered as exclusive, non-retail editions or conversely larger expensive bundles available only for retail sale only. This set up provides the benefit of investing in comics merchandise that could have a far greater retail value in the future. Plus, the emotional level of feeling connected with the artistic process. Pledgers can sometimes become early enthusiasts of said artists/project of interest, wanting to help and watch succeed, which can be exhilarating enough to invest money in (Putting Your Money Where Your Mouse Is, 2010).

To illustrate the above crowdfunding opportunities, we look at a recent and successful Kickstarter project entitled *Sink* (2018). A Scottish based creative team offered a crime/horror graphic novel. They ran their crowdfunding project for 2 weeks had 536 backers and raised $28,297, easily surpassing their initial goal of $8k. Their products for pledging varied from the cheapest $10 for 'barebones' digital copy. 160page pdf which collects *Sink* issues #1-5. 68 people backed this product. 131 backers bought the softcover printed volume for $25. Like the digital version, this contained 160 pages of *Sink* issues #1-5. The most popular option was the signed, numbered, hardback, at $45. A limited run of only 500 editions advertised as unavailable in comics stores. This option received 203 backers. This type of success story gives hope to the aspiring comic creators of the future, allowing creators from even the most deprived backgrounds a potential avenue to publish their works, which might otherwise have gone unread. Through community and

crowdfunding, Web 2.0 has made it easy for any budding comics designer to publish comics strip content on to the internet. With the evolution of creative software, novice artists now have access to a platform from which to display their comics work for others to view, share, purchase and comment upon. Before the rise of the internet and crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter, this avenue for expression would have been difficult to achieve without significant personal economic capital or a publishing deal (Hinton and Hjorth, 2013).

Web based services allow individuals to create public or semi-public profiles, which they can then use to connect with others within the system. Before the internet, the timeline for public feedback was lengthy. The stages of going from artwork, production, publication, distribution to the public could take many months, sometimes as long as a year. And to compound the issue further, any public feedback would often go directly to the editor missing the vital loop of original artist. It is worth mentioning that in the 1960s, Stan Lee tapped into the notion of feedback, allowing fans to feel part of a community with *Stan's SoapBox* and *Bullpen Bulletins.* Mark Evanier (2017) notes that if you wrote to DC comics you wrote to 'Dear Editor' but if you wrote to the Marvel books you wrote to Dear Stan and Jack. This created the impression that you were on first name terms with the creators and therefore perhaps, on some level, were friends. Sean Howe (2013) states that in doing this, Lee establishes a pre-internet forum and comics community. Where readers' addresses would be left on their letters in the comics so people could in turn write to each other and start fan clubs, such as *The Merry Marvel Marching Society.*

With the birth of the internet, the idea of delayed public feedback has transformed yet again. This revolutionary platform has provided the ability for immediate public commentary. Instant feedback

is directly available, as is entering citizenship within part of a virtual community of shared interests. Fans can and will like/dislike work sometimes, provoking the artist to adapt, expand or change their body of work. This public critique can be actively sought by comic creators requiring public feedback to stimulate growth and evolution in their professional output. Strategies for building readership and communities are highly effective when creators use tools such as blogs and forums.

3. Key Individuals of Notable Success

This section explores key individuals of either notable historical importance or contemporary success within the comics industry. The selected individuals are Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster; Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird; Mark Millar; Randall Monroe; Noelle Stevenson; Gail Simone vs Richard C. Meyer.

3.1 Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster

In 1938, Siegel and Shuster compromised on their dream of seeing the character they had created as children be published in a newspaper comic. Having tried and failed to get their character published anywhere else, they agreed to sell Superman to DC, then called National Comics, for $130. DC's plan was to use Superman as the lead feature in a new comic book titled *Action Comics* (Wright, 2001, p.7). The popularity was instant and grew and grew. By the seventh issue, *Action Comics* was selling over half-a-million copies each month (Wright, 2001, p.9).

By 1941, Superman had gone from a character deemed too risky by many to print, to be the first character to have his own self-titled comic. He was still the main attraction for readers of *Action Comics,* as well as now appearing in *World's Finest Comics* and *All Star Comics* (Morrison, 2012, p.11). Superman soon transcended the comics pages.

He was first heard on radio broadcasts in 1940, then in the animated shows from 1941. As Morrison (2012, p.11) confirms "He was on radio, syndicated across the funny pages of every major US newspaper, and selling stamps, greeting cards, colouring books, bubble gum, board games and war bonds." Siegel and Shuster were earning a reported thirty-five dollars per page for their production of the comics. This was, at the time, the highest pay rate not only at DC but in the entire industry. They were also earning 5% of all other revenue brought in by the Man of Steel (Wright, 2014).

But, in 1946, upon grasping the enormity of just how much capital Superman was bringing in for National, they decided to sue the company. Sadly, for Siegel and Shuster the courts decided that having sold the character back in 1938, at the age of just twenty-three, there was no legal infringement and they, therefore, lost the case. They would never work again on a character that would reach the popularity of Superman. After the court case both men continued to work within the comics industry. However, neither created another character of substance. Nor did they find the wealth and acclaim that they deserved from their original creation. In 1975, however, after mounting pressure, Warner Bros settled with Siegel and Shuster, granting them $20,000 a year as compensation. They would also guarantee that Siegel and Shuster would have a creator credit on all future releases that involved the Man of Steel. Grant Morrison points out the comics business has come a long but today a prolific and popular comics artist has the potential of making $20,000 dollars a week (Morrison, 2012, p.13).

Conversely, Jones (2004, p.333) states that by the ends of their lives, their pensions had in fact surpassed $100,000 and that their heirs would continue to receive the same.

Therefore, if perhaps we are to argue that success is based on merchandise and movies, then both The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Superman have been very successful. Siegel and Shuster were unable to receive the full rewards of their creation because of the contract deals they signed in their early twenties. In comparison, Eastman and Laird had already enjoyed a lengthy control over their creations and a share of merchandising when they sold their rights to the Turtles. They had the opportunity to be part of the phenomenon, rather than being pushed aside as it happened. And the selling price would have been of far greater value than the $130 that Siegel and Shuster made. These examples should be widely known by potential creators as they highlight the danger of undervaluing intellectual property and selling out for a quick buck, unlike the Turtles' and Superman's creators, who had no precognition of any possible commercial opportunities for development when they first started. To increase the chances of success is it beneficial when creating comics to consider the wider possibilities of a project and the financial boons that can be gained with merchandising and interest from the Hollywood industry.

3.2 Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird

In 1983, two unknown comics artists, Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird, began sketching reptiles embracing weapons. Surpassing each other's idea with every new sketch, these small details and additions evolved to become the intellectual property that is known to millions as *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Interestingly, a key ingredient to the Turtles' inception was copycat stealing from other successful comics at the time. For example, the adjectives in the comics' title were all taken from other comics. Further evidence of borrowed ideas can be found in the anthropomorphic animals of Carl Banks and Steve Gerber, while the storyline borrows many of the

elements from the successful Marvel Comics series *Daredevil,* e.g. in the first issue of *Teenage*

Mutant Ninja Turtles, Eastman and Laird took an event that occurred in the very first issue of

Daredevil (1963). The accident that made Daredevil blind is retold so that the same accident now

effects the Turtles turning them into mutant turtles (Farago, 2014). The self-published first issue

was released a year later with an initial print run of 3,000. Drawn in black and white and what

could be described as a rough, sketchy style this seemed fitting for the homemade, parody driven

combination of the narrative (but was more likely just to keep costs down). The sales for the first

instalment were reasonably successful, enough to generate a follow-up instalment. This was also

timed in conjunction with the direct market flow of comics stores opening across America. At the

time, the fans that bought the Turtles comics were typically those who were reading the books

that Eastman and Laird were parodying, and either understood the joke, or enjoyed the dark

brooding ninja characters (see Frank Miller's *Ronin* (1983-1984) and *Daredevil* (1980-1986)

respectively). The *Turtles* comics created their own boom for a while in the comics industry with

some artists and writers trying to match the parody and black and white style to achieve success.

At this point, whilst the *Turtles* were proving popular for comics fans, they were not the smash hit

that would follow. Seeing an opportunity for future success with *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,*

a licensing agent named Mark Freedman connected with Eastman and Laird. Freedman noticed with

some tweaking *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* could enjoy the same sort of success as *He-Man*

(1983-86), *G.I. Joe* (1983-86) and the *Transformers* (1984-87). The idea would be to make child

friendly cartoon series that would really be a 25-minute (episodes) worth of advertisements for toys

(Collins, 2014). For the TV series, the violence of the comics was toned down, the dark and gritty

world removed. Instead, the Turtles became light-hearted, full of puns and comedy catchphrases. In

fact, whilst the names of the characters and indeed the title remained the same, the show was ultimately very different both tonally and visually from the original. No longer was this the story that two young men dreamed up together, but one that was engineered by business minded men selling toys, video games and everything else you could possibly imagine (Couch, 2015).

Adding to this craze was also *The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie released in 1990. The film took elements from the cartoon, the differing character dynamics, coloured headbands but, in fact, was more loyal to the original comic, with many of the panels from the original comic entirely recalled within the film. The movie was made for $13.5 million and went on to break the then record for the highest-grossing independent movie with a worldwide box office of $201,965,915. The subsequent sequels over the years have seen the turtles make over a billion dollars worldwide at the box office (BoxOfficeMojo). It could be hypothesized that the Turtles were created as fan art for the comics that Eastman and Laird loved. Conversely, there is no evidence to suggest that the Turtles' initial creation was a serious attempt at commercial success. However, that's certainly what they became.

Today, the rights to the Turtles are split between two companies. The comics are owned by IDW publishing and the TV and film rights belong to Nickelodeon. Both creators Eastman and Laird have now sold the majority of their rights to the Turtles and are no longer in full control of these stories or indeed what happens next to our 'heroes in a half shell.' The Turtles comics constructed a marketing and merchandise phenomenon producing unquestionable financial success. Over 30 years later and this financial revenue continues with new animated shows and comics planned on

the horizon. The comics have proven undeniably successful, especially when you consider that they are still being printed and have a loyal fan base passed on from generation to generation.

However, whilst the characters of the Turtles are household names their creators are not. Looking through the past 100 years of comics there are not many comics creators that emerge with this acknowledgment. There are a number of possible reasons for this, one being the rights for comics creators versus the publishers were not what they are today. In fact, the creators of comic's first superstar and industry defining character, *Superman* are a perfect example of what poor rights the creators had.

3.3 Mark Millar

Mark Millar has gone from comic book writer to setting up his own publishing company, MillarWorld, which he then sold to Netflix in a multi-million-pound deal. Mark Millar began pushing the limits of violent stories when he took over the superhero genre redefining, *The Authority* (2003) from Warren Ellis. Eventually Millar's dark scripts meant that DC publisher Paul Levitz would let him go (Morrison, 2012). He left *The Authority* and began work on *Kick-As*s (2008) 'the baddest damn comic ever!' (Gravett, 2014) (I believe that's bad in a good way). Gravett goes on to explain that Millar's story telling range goes beyond violence, controversy and taboo. After a visit to New York post 9/11, Millar wrote the highly acclaimed *Civil War* (2006). Basing the narrative on the American Patriot Act, Millar crafted the state registration of superheroes. Constructing a fresh twist on essentially an archetypal story of two superheroes going toe to toe. His success here was to create a superhero story that was not only entertaining but could also be a relevant commentary on the occurrences on the modern world.

Kick-Ass (2008) is not the only one of Millar's comics that was successfully translated into a Hollywood blockbuster movie. Two years before the *Kick-Ass* (2010) movie, *Wanted* (2008) was released and in 2015, *The Kingsman.* All three of these stories have a seemingly relatable protagonist that allow the reader to imagine that anything is possible and that this alternative reality could happen to them. *Wanted* had a down-on- his-luck office worker who found out he had the abilities of a super assassin; all be it a supervillain assassin. *The Kingsman* featured a working-class teenage tearaway who became a James Bondian super-spy. And then there is the story of the relatable, every day, friendly teenager Dave Lizewski and his potty mouthed sidekick Hit Girl. *Kick-Ass* was full both of shocking and crowd-pleasing moments and some memorable one- liners. Despite the ultra-violence and superhuman abilities, Millar's characters have a relatability that few other comic creations have. Millar's retelling of some classic characters are also versions that Hollywood seems to like. The current cinematic version of the Avengers is based on Millar's *The Ultimates* (2002) and the critically acclaimed *Logan* (2017) was based on Millar's story of an ageing Wolverine in *Old Man Logan* (2009)*.* And of course, the aforementioned *Civil War* was also added to this list. All these success stories have one thing in common: Millar manages to give them a connection to the here and now, and instil the idea of real-world consequences, even for characters which are essentially gods. This allowed fans to empathise and sympathise with these fantastical characters and at the same time be aware of their limitations.

Before his career in comics, Millar briefly studied economics at university and some of his current success seems to be shaped by his business acumen. Having worked for both DC and Marvel in his career, Millar set up Millarworld using a model not too dissimilar to that of Image. Millarworld allows Millar, as a writer, to retain control and ownership of his work. This is shared with whoever

Millar has decided to pick to be the artist on the project and typically these artists are well-regarded within the industry. Unlike the industry norm, both the artist and the writer would not get paid per page, but instead make money on the sales and future use of the characters and merchandise. Millar's business experience and the well documented litany of comic creators who made terrible financial errors, has allowed him to take charge of his intellectual property and make it work for him. Other creators should take heed of Millar's actions and retain control, rather than sell out for a quick profit.

In August 2017, Millarworld was purchased by Netflix. The purchase of Millarworld by Netflix is considered to be the third biggest acquisition in comics history. With the other two being when Warner Bros obtained DC comics in 1968 and Marvel being purchased by Disney in 2009. Now in 2018, reports have been released that Netflix has surpassed Disney as the most valuable US media company (Helmore, 2018) and this will only continue to grow and create more opportunities for Millarworld and, in turn, Mark Millar. Millar's net worth is said to be around $25million (Barrett, 2018). Yet whilst there are those who believe he is Britain's answer to Stan Lee (Barnett, 2018), others would say that they have an aversion to Millar's comics and the notion that he creates comics with the sole intention of them becoming a film before the comic has been published (Flanagan, 2011). These critics deem that Millar's attitude and writing show a lack of respect to comics as a medium and indeed what creative and compelling narratives can be crafted. Instead, they argue that his choices are 'bankrupt of decency and feel crafted by a horny, teenage sociopath' (Griffin, 2013).

Millar's writing does indeed include content that is both deplorable and upsetting and he certainly splits fan opinion polls. But does this change if he is a success? Looking through the history books there have always been comics that have caused shock and upset *Tales from the Crypt* (1950-1955) *Tygers from Tales of Green Lantern Corps* (1986) and *Trials of Nasty Tales* (1975) to name but a few (Gravett, 2014). It must be noted that perceptions change and the level to which content is acceptable is always maturing. What was shocking ten years ago may not be the same as it is today. This works in two ways; some academics (Cohen, 2011) will state that with constant viewing and reading of horrendous events across the media that the viewer will can become desensitised to these atrocities. But there are those that challenge what is deemed appropriate and acceptable for comics creators to include in their stories. Not in the same vein Fredric Wertham did before the comics code was introduced. Instead, looking towards the likes of Noelle Stevenson's *Hawkeye Initiative* (2012) and before that, Gail Simone's *Women in Refrigerators* (1999).

3.4 Randall Munroe

Munroe started out working in physics at NASA's Langley Research Centre. In September 2005 Munroe began to scan his many stick doodles into his computer and put them on his website. He named the comic strip *XKCD* with the tag line 'a webcomic of romance, sarcasm, math and language' (Munroe, 2005). The web comic received enough of an initial positive response that within a year Munroe decided to quit his job in engineering and work on the comic full time. Putting up a new comic strip every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Despite Munroe's evident lack of artistic training and his proclivity for stickmen, he self-claims his position within the comics industry as the 'heir to Charles Schultz's Peanuts' (Cohen, 2008).

There have been many theories and discussions about the deeper meaning or hidden acronym in the title *XKCD*, however Munroe states that the title is 'just a word with no phonetic pronunciation.' (Cohen, 2008). *XKCD* has since received wide critical acclaim. Voted 'best comic strip' by readers in 2007 and 2008 Weblog Awards and won the Hugo award 'Best Graphic Story' for *Time* (2014) (McCarty et al., 2014).

As free webcomics, Munroe's financial revenue stems mainly from merchandise. It is a healthy stream of income, selling thousands of t-shirts every month. Munroe has also released several spinoff books. His first being the fundraising book *XKCD - Volume 0* (2005). Within 6 months 25,000 copies sold raising $32,000 dollars to build a school in Laos (Ohanian, 2010). The buoyant sales of books and merchandise are indicative of his far-reaching audience and influence. This is also telling in the numerous incidents of *XKCD* inspired organised activities. For example, the game of 'Geohashing' now boasts over 1,000 players who journey to arbitrary coordinates calculated by the algorithm defined in the *XKCD* comic '*Geohashing*' (O'Kane, 2007).

As demonstrated by Randall Munroe, merchandising can be a necessary additional vehicle for income for all comics artists. Interestingly, despite its loyal fan base, when compared with the broader world of publishing, the printed comic book market-share is principally small; 'despite wider availability, comic book sales remain very low compared to other media. Even a comic's own adaptations in other medias are seen as far more successful than the original comic' (Kalder, 2013). If the cost of a comic is either free or cheap, other streams of revenue are required. These may appear in the form of merchandise, movie deals or even a cartoon series.

Henry Jenkins (2006) discussed *The Matrix* franchise as an example of cross media experience. Not only were three movies made, but there were also a series of graphic novels, two computer games and a collection of animated shorts compiled together to form the *Animatrix* (2003) film. The important mechanism at play for cross media to work is that the alternative media are not a straightforward retelling of each other in various formats and platforms. Instead, they are part of the same story, designed to enrich the story. For example, with one of the *Matrix* computer games *Enter the Matrix* the player had the option to pick from two lesser characters from the film. This was intended to fill in gaps on where these characters had been during the movie and what influences they had on the overall narrative. Often labelled transmedia, this cross-media strategy is well used within the comics sphere to reach new audiences. Often released in conjunction with new movies and games, comics are being released as prequels or epilogues. This model can attract new readers to comics who may wish to discover supplementary material on a character. Or at the very least, it works to further promote the original source material. With cross media experiences being operated to promote alternative formats it makes sense that it is usually larger companies like DC/Warner Brothers that can afford to utilise this model. However, small independent comics producers have in the past developed their characters into huge global phenomena. The case studied below is not on transmedia, but instead showcases how being flexible and marketing to alternative age ranges across all sorts of mediums and platforms can prove to be hugely successful.

3.5 Noelle Stevenson

Before graduating from Maryland Institute College of Art, Noelle Stevenson's voice was heard within the comics community (MICA Creatives*,* Noelle Stevenson, 2012). In 2012, she and a friend

spent one evening sketching the male superhero Marvel's Hawkeye in the same outrageously sexual poses that were routinely used for his female counterparts (Stevenson, 2012). Stevenson posted her drawings online, attracting a large public reaction. This quickly bloomed into the hugely successful Hawkeye Initiative. It was not long before numerous artists participated in this social commentary- highlighting the notoriously sexist world of comics book art. The Hawkeye Initiative amassed a respectable following on her Tumblr site.

Combined as an experimental art project and thesis for her senior year, Stevenson used Tumblr to release a weekly one or two-page comic called *Nimona* (2012)*. In Nimona*, the story's heroine took inspiration from Stevenson's own experiences of craving to be the masculine cosplay characters at conventions. This idea inspired her to create a 'butch' heroine for *Nimona*. The comic was positively received both critically and by fans. Awarded 'The Best Webcomic 2012' by Slate (Slate, Announcing the Winners of the Cartoonist Studio Prize, 2013). In 2015, it was published in paperback format by HarperCollins. The *Nimona* graphic novel has been nominated for the 2015 Eisner Award, National Book Award and won the Nebula Award and Cybil's Award in the 'Young Graphic Novel' category (Cavna, 2015). Since then, she has written for *Lumberjanes,* (2012-2015) recognized as Best New Series and Best Publication for Teens in the 2015 Eisner Awards, plus, other projects such as *Runaways* (2015) and *Wander Over Yonder* (2013-2016). Her current project is to reboot, produce and write the new animated *She-Ra* for Netflix. In a male dominated industry, her success is evident. One could argue that her success came bilaterally: her stance on creating strong feminine archetypes allowed her to champion the underrepresented female readership: whilst her strong online audience opened publishing doors that perhaps would have stayed firmly shut to an aspiring comics novice (Robinson, 2015).

One undue criticism levelled against the 'novice' creating unedited content is their inability to supersede professional artists who have significant training and experience in their field. However, while artistic originality is often seen as the elite realm of trained artists or design professionals, raw creativity has continually proven to be an activity that anybody can engage in (Burgess, 2008). And perhaps any lack of training should not devalue the worth of a creative piece or negate its existence, as even the work of established creators can be problematic, as highlighted by Gail Simone and her fight against the objectivization of female characters in comics.

3.6 Gail Simone versus Richard C. Meyer

In 1999, Gail Simone created the website *Women in Refrigerators* (1999), which comprised of a list of female comics book characters who had been "depowered, raped, or cut up and stuck in the refrigerator." She challenged what comics culture had for years deemed acceptable for its female characters. And in doing so she also challenged the readership, "If you demolish most of the characters girls like, then girls won't read comics." (Simone, 1999) Simone has gone on to be one of the most recognisable female voices in comics. Simone is not just a pioneer and campaigner for women's rights, she has now become a leading storyteller with work for DC including *Wonder Woman* and *Batgirl*. In 2012. the editor of Batgirl dismissed Simone with no apparent reason and whilst the series was producing good sales figures. Simone posted an announcement of her dismissal online. This quickly found its way to her fans, who were upset by her sacking and complained in numbers until DC was forced to take her back (Scott, 2016). It is still not known why DC sacked Simone in the first place. But what is evident is that the fans were upset in ways that you do not often hear with other creator sackings. This could be because the fans not only like the stories that she was telling, but also the values that Simone holds.

However, where it might be considered that all comics fans would embrace the notion of diversity throughout its creators and the work that they, in turn, produce. Recently, a conflict has emerged between the comics industry and some fans, which has become known as Comicsgate. Following closely the same conflicts as 2014's Gamergate, Comicsgate sees a number of the industry's creatives and anyone with a viewpoint outside the established norm, being targeted with online abuse and harassment. The attacks are usually aimed towards women, people of colour and the LGBT community (Berlatsky, 2018). The attackers appear to work in several ways. They use social media, blogs, and video sharing sites to comment on their targets, baiting them for response. Frequently the comments are targeted towards the creator's appearance often involving abhorrent sexual remarks. Whilst perhaps it is fair to ascertain that ignorant trolling is occurring. Some consider these comments as a stand against what comics are becoming - more diverse.

Those that believe their comments are grounded in motivation for change within comics include Richard Meyer. Meyer states that his comments are based on his perception that the comics industry's waning sales figures are solely a result of the numbers of diverse creators working in the industry. Meyer is the creator of a YouTube channel twitter page entitled Diversity and Comics. And since the rise of Comicsgate his subscribers have steadily increased. The YouTube site has at the time of writing, 79,925 subscribers. Meyer uses the channel to spread and create animosity toward those creators he believes are at fault for the issues he has with comics. Often labelling these creators as social justice warriors, he believes that:

> SJW's only get their job because of surface qualities, being a woman, being
> black, being gay, being trans, and there's no adjustment on the ground to
> negative fan reaction due to low sales. They can't spot basic typos, they

can't notice major plot holes, they antagonise the fans... I talk to people,

actual legitimate talents, who can't get a job to save their lives. Meanwhile

some airhead who calls the fans Nazis and turns out laughably bad work is

getting Eisner awards (Elbein, 2018).

With a large online presence, his comments provide fuel and motivation for further public attacks

on creators via social media. Those that criticise or respond to these comments can find that this

only generates further altercations. Creators have found that responses are sometimes copied and

uploaded to his YouTube site. Seen by others associated with Comicsgate, this results in more

aggressors joining the attack (Elbein, 2018). Meyer and his fellow attackers hypothesize that the

only route for comics industry survival is a return to the male dominated days of the nineties.

Chiefly, if a female superhero character is to exist, she is expected to have next to no clothes and

larger than average breasts - more PowerGirl and less the modern Ms Marvel and Squirrel Girl. It is

worth remembering that many see the nineties as a dark period in comics history (as discussed in

the comics history section of the thesis. From money grabbing gimmicks, a man dominated

industry telling male stories and Marvel having to file for bankruptcy in 1996.)

Meyer's critics believe he is failing to recognise (or choosing to ignore) other explanations that are

by chance having a negative impact on the comics industry. Issues such as the large amount of

event comics, where the reader is encouraged to purchase tie-in titles to understand the full story.

In addition, we might consider the now dependable re-launch of a series, with characters or

storylines having all historical legacy dismissed. This recently happened twice at DC with the launch

of the *New 52* (2011) and subsequent *Rebirth* (2016) titles. Both gimmicks, along with the likes of

variant covers, can adversely affect the public's purchasing enthusiasm, causing them to lose

interest in a character and/or title due to the throw-away nature of the storyline. It may also be that comics readers are branching out and looking to other publishers and genres as an alternative to the superhero and other publishing methods like webcomics.

Comicsgate as discussed has seen Meyer's online popularity grow. He has recently used this to launch a very successful Kickstarter campaign. Comicsgate, Gamergate and the Sad Puppies/Rabid Puppies incidents have emerged from individuals strategically picking online fights and causing controversy. Profiles have been raised to the point of achieving sizeable followings allowing large amounts of money to be raised on sites like Kickstarter and Patreon. Whilst Meyer's viewpoint and social stance diametrically oppose Gail Simone's both of their opinions and online discussions have raised their profiles in the industry to the point where they are now comics creators rather than just commentators on the field.

It is plausible to propose that success is achieved if you successfully manage to get your viewpoint heard, acknowledged, and publicly supported. If we refine that question further, we can ask ourselves; does success allow you to have a voice? Or does your voice provide the success?

4.Methodology

This chapter explores the methodological approach to the interrogative process whilst outlining the chosen research structure.

The thesis research is bi-topic in its structure: Chapter three looks at key individuals of notable historical and contemporary success in the form of case studies; chapter five features dialogues with comics industry professionals and comics fans, which offer insightful first- hand data and are gained in the form of empirical evidence. Chapter three's case study methodology was chosen for its ability to offer in depth analysis on previously well documented success stories of historical importance e.g., *Superman*'s creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. With Siegel and Shuster dying in 1996 and 1992, an opportunity to interview either creative was understandably impossible, however failing to mention Siegel and Shuster's seminal *Superman* character and its effect upon the comics industry and the creators' evident 'success' as a theme, would have been a negligent omission to the thesis. Another example for the need of case studies is Mark Millar; a similar challenge of attaining direct empirical access, if we exchange the barrier of Siegel and Shuster's' deaths with Millar's industry gatekeepers (due to his current blockbuster success) denying permission of access, all routes for qualitative research in the form of death or unreturned emails impedes access to potential research participants. Inclusion of both historical and contemporary comics case studies are necessary when forming evidence of significant success within the industry from a particular stance of importance. As Thomas points out 'a case study is about the particular rather than the general. You cannot generalise from a case study' (Thomas, 2016). To be able to pull evidence where necessary from all eras allows for a greater understanding of specific approaches to trade 'success' and their possible consequences on peer creativity and influence, plus their contributing financial stimulus within the industry.

To gain qualitative data, I conducted multiple interpersonal semi-structured interviews. The interviewees offered varying degrees of experience within the comics industry; participants included writers, artists, publishers, academics, and the readership audience. Interviewing the concept of comics' success across a diverse spectrum of people within the comics industry captured

a broad-stroke overview of comics and a broader overview of any successes either experienced or witnessed. With a wide demographic having the potential to tell contrasting stories, it was challenging to produce a rigid formulaic set of questions that accurately related to all interviewees.

This style of questioning was quickly deemed unconducive in terms of producing adequate qualitative or quantitative data. A semi-structured dialogue was deliberately chosen with intentionally open-ended questions. Qualitative questioning of this nature encouraged the interviewee to answer in greater detail than a questionnaire or closed questions might allow. (Gillham, 2005, McGraw-Hill, Research interviewing) In obtaining these qualitative answers, I was able to examine the cognitive thought process behind them. Kvale states that 'The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say' (2006). If we take this into consideration, it is not just the answers that I am looking for, but to gain a further understanding of the reasoning behind the answers.

That said, choosing semi-structured one-to-one interviews over other data gathering options potentially provides both advantages and disadvantages. For example, a universal questionnaire/survey offers the advantage of gathering data without having to spend time or money on travelling. Creating one sole survey, and using the platform of digital media, theoretically the survey could reach hundreds of comics book creatives and fans across the globe, resulting in extensive data to analyse. The disadvantage here is the answers and scope of questions would, by the very nature of the expansive industry, need to be inclusive to all possible respondents and therefore limited in its breadth of questioning. In contrast, unstructured interviews containing open-ended questions can have the advantage of extricating answers of depth and detail from a personalised viewpoint, providing organically evolved content and the opportunity for superior

understanding of each individual experience. The disadvantage here is the time spread over fewer

people, decreasing the sample size whilst requiring complex analytical and interpretative

techniques. Upon consideration the advantages of the open-ended interview were of most benefit

to the thesis. To gain optimal results the interview methods stated in Media Research Methods

(Bertrand & Hughes, 2017, p.80) were actioned.

To make the best use of this interviewing method, the interviewer should:
- Avoid closed questions.
- Avoid presuppositions…
- Avoid 'either/or' questions…
- Ask only one thing at a time.
- Be clear and neutral, define terms or give examples…
- Avoid 'why' questions…
- Ask follow up questions, restate a question to qualify…
- Maintain control, keep to a checklist, bit do so discreetly.
- Be attentive and listen…
- Avoid making comments that appear to evaluate what the interviewee is saying

The necessity of obtaining qualitative data from industry professionals regularly demonstrated the

intermediary obstacle of industry gatekeepers, whether the gatekeepers were publishers blocking

access to artists or agents or blocking access to writers. Kurt Lewin's 1947 theory of Gatekeepers

proposed that a gatekeeper controlled the messages that are read and engaged with by the

audience. Lewin's theory was hypothesised when he investigated the change of shopping

behaviours on housewives that had attended detailed lectures and were given specific information.

Noting the use of the one-way communications model, of lecturer to housewife or sender to

receiver, it is evident that the gatekeeper theory does not have to include the media at all (Roberts, 2005). Instead, Lewin's theory showcases that in a position of influence or authority, anyone with the ability to pass on information could be deemed to be a gatekeeper. Obtaining interviews with people of varying comics experience, influence and authority through brokering or sidestepping several gatekeepers was an important aspect of gaining direct access to interviewees such as Simon Hanselmann & Roger Sabin. Using this inclusive wide reaching research methodology allowed problem solving to focus not only on getting past gatekeepers but also on hurdles such as work schedules, being willing to talk and if they believe that you will not convey their message or alter what they intend to say (Harvey, 2010).

The initial plan was for this thesis to be submitted in the form of an edited twenty-five- minute documentary. The key considerations behind the initial decision to make a documentary over a written thesis was one of accessibility and legacy. It felt judicious to create an easily accessible artefact, not only for academics to view, but also comics industry professionals, fans and future creatives potentially requiring an insight into the publishing trade. I also valued the reflective nature of the documentary artform in its parallels to comics and their similar tools for production. Both comics and documentaries have cheap and accessible creative tools that can be used for production, uploading and distribution, potentially both inexpensively and swiftly. Inge Ejbye Sorensen writes:

> The ability to stream and upload unlimited audio-visual content online, are
> affecting how media texts are produced, distributed and received and that
> in this process, the positions of producers in the documentary industry are
> being renegotiated and redefined. […] Although the physical production
> process of developing, shooting, and editing have not changed beyond

recognition, producers and investors have new funding and distribution avenues for their content and can therefore no longer be certain about which production model offer the most effective route to fund their films and recoup investments (Sørensen, 2013).

In the early parts of the research, I experienced a number of complications in filming the interviewees e.g., personal bodged filming attempts, hiring cameramen that did not turn up, equipment breaking, interviewees freezing in front of the camera, and so on… Repeatedly the logistics of organising and paying for a cameraman and his travel expenses and equipment, provided too many costs, complications and lengthy delays. Ultimately the decision to shelve the documentary and realign to the classical MA route of written thesis was disappointing but wholly necessary – to give up on the doc and exchange it for a .doc. Once the switch to a written pathway was finalised the MA research process experienced a smoother progression of exploration.

4.1 Ethical Considerations

To make sure that that the interviewees felt well informed and safe guarded, ethical consideration was required. This investigation was voluntary, free, and those who contributed their time, insights, and effort for the use of my research were asked to give their consent. Informed consent was obtained either in writing via email conversations or given orally. The informed consent made sure that participants understood what was required from them and that they had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. The

participants understood that their contribution was voluntary with no monetary incentive and that

they were free to withdraw if requested. The consent form also informed the participants that all

interview content and data would not be anonymised before analysis.

The initial email sent to all prospective participants informed them of the following: purpose of the

research; why they had been invited into the study; how long their participation would take; what

would be done with the information collected; the risks involved in taking part; any possible

benefits; if their participation was confidential; what would happen to the results; who to contact if

the participants had any more questions; who to contact if the participants had any complaints.

A full copy of the consent form and information sheet are available in the Appendix.

The interviewed participants that were asked to take part in the research met the inclusion criteria.

Within the inclusion criteria the importance of attaining participants of a wide gamut of Comic

creative success, style, age, creative platform, geographies, and demographic was acknowledged as

vital. This aspect of inclusion meant that the research gained an unabridged and holistic

understanding of the industry from the creatives perspective.

The interviewed participants who took part in this research were:

1. Roger Sabin a Professor at Central St. Martins in London

2. John Miers lecturer and researcher at Central St Martin

3. David Lloyd artist on the renowned comics title V for Vendetta and creator of

digital comics company Aces Weekly.

4. Simon Hanselmann, Eisner award winning comics artist published by Fantagraphics.

5. Thom Burgess is a comics writer with three self-published titles.

6. Adam Cadwell, comics artist working in the independent scene

7. Ben Mcloud is a comics artist and fan. Once worked for 2000ad.

8. Owen Clarke is a lifelong reader of comics.

A more detailed statement of each interviewee is available in the Appendix.

5.Discussion of Investigation

Having conducted primary and secondary research, I utilised the information to discuss the theoretical importance of fandom, gatekeepers, and definitions of success. The concluding section identifies practical strategies to comic success, exploring the following pathways: Newspaper and Comic Strips; Alternative Small Press; Periodical Comic Books & Graphic Novels; Miscellaneous Print; Webcomics.

5.1 Understanding Success, Fandom and Gatekeepers

"When your desires are strong enough, you will appear to possess superhuman powers to achieve" Napoleon Hill (1928).

What is Success? The Oxford Press Dictionary has two definitions:

1. The attainment of fame, wealth, or social status.

2. *noun* A person or thing that achieves desired aims or attains fame,

   wealth, etc (O.U.P. 1980).

These two classifications indicate the word "success" can be viewed as either an experience or an attainment. From Thom Burgess' point of view notoriety and income go together:

> I'd deem a success to be when you gain positive notoriety from your peers of your chosen genre within comics/graphic novels. Also, a healthy number of sales and interest in your books. I see that as down to a mixture of publishing and self- publishing. Certainly, in my case, it would be if *Ghoster* were to be finalised into a graphic novel and then released to a largely positive audience. I'd absolutely take that as success in some small form (Burgess, T. 2015, personal communication, 11th November).

When investigating the characteristics of success, it is necessary to examine the personal prosperity and level of achievement within each individual's own working context; without forgetting success's wider meaning and broader perspective - it is well known that one person's view of success in the sense of a good outcome can look quite different to others' (Bartolome and Evans, 1980). Both experience and attainment of success need to be considered and accompanied by any factors that lead to the 'successful career'. That said, the term "success" in the context of the comics industry still needs to be pinned down. Not only in its definition but how it is obtained and importantly maintained. Some would state that career success is a gradual process that unfolds over time (Judge et al.,1999). And therefore, perhaps a pragmatic overview is 'an artist/writer who not only survives but thrives in any economy' (Thibault, 2009).

When looking at the psychology behind career success Judge et al (1999) noted that there were two components to career success - extrinsic and intrinsic factors. They stated that extrinsic success is reasonably objective and observable. Thus, the notable outcomes would be easily observed such as increases of salary or promotions. Intrinsic was defined as being the subjects' own reflections on his or her career. This would be comprised of self-critique and one's own estimation on the of how satisfied one is with one's job.

There are numerous other possible factors that are relevant to defining career success. Sociologists look towards the importance of occupational status, highlighting that for some vocations it is necessary to have had the educational background to acquire the position. This educational background has its own path to career success with the dexterities and comprehension that come with education. Occupational status would also emphasise that a key route to career success is in understanding how the subject is situated in terms of society with direct correlation to their work performance. 'Sociologists often view occupational status as the most important sign of success in contemporary society (Korman, Mahler and Omran, 1983, p. 201).

Judge et al (1999) point out that psychologists have generated a five-factor model to measure personality traits. The 'Big Five', as the model has been labelled, consists of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Judge et al distinguished that, of the Big Five, three of the dimensions - neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness - fit best when discussing career success. They noted that neurotic individuals are more likely to suffer from negative moods (anxiety, fear, depression, irritability) and physical symptoms. Extraverts were far more gregarious and social. They were noted for being impulsive and

less introspective and self-reflexive than introverts. Conscientiousness was distinguished as having three main aspects: orientation (hardworking and persistent), dependability (responsible and careful) and orderliness (methodical). Thus, conscientiousness shows a desire for future growth and achievement. Consequently, we could assume that conscientiousness would be the most integral part of any procedure for career success. However, there are certainly numerous vocations in which high levels of frankness and consideration would cause concerns and impede job performance. It is interesting to note that according to Sternberg:

> successful intelligent people defy negative expectations even when these expectations arise from low scores on IQ or similar tests. They do not let other peoples' assessment stop them from achieving their goals. They find their path and then pursue it, realizing that there will be obstacles along the way and that surmounting these obstacles is part of their challenge (Sternberg, 1996, p. 19).

These important success factors such as IQ scores, negative, positive expectations, personality traits are just as relevant for careers in comics. As mentioned above, there are some jobs that may require a level of neuroticism to do complete the job well. I instantly think of the stereotypical portrayal of lawyers and defence attorneys. But if I take stereotypes and imagine cartoonists, I think of a man sitting alone at a drawing desk working into the early hours of the morning. On reflection, this lonely man may be a perception based on the likes of Silver Age favourites like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko.

There are numerous accounts of both artists not wanting to be part of the limelight that Stan Lee, an extravert, so agreeably gravitated towards throughout his career. If we take this on-board and

consider the notion that neuroticism has a negative impact on career success, Kirby's attention to detail and experimentation with foreground made him an important name within the industry. However, as Kevin Smith considers, "if you go to the average person and ask, 'who is Jack Kirby?' they might say 'I dunno' but if you say 'who is Stan Lee?' they say 'Spiderman, Marvel Comics." (*The Mighty Misfits Who Made Marvel*, 2017) Where Lee was confident and charismatic, Kirby was shy and found it difficult to be outspoken. On January 9th 1966, an article in the *New York Herald Tribune* (Evanier, 2017) was published entitled "*Superheroes with Super Problems*" by Nat Freedland. It depicted Lee as the mastermind behind Marvel's success and reduced Kirby's part to that of an 'assistant foreman in a girdle factory', a rather quirky term, suggesting that Kirby wielded no real power despite his position in the industry. No mention was made of him being arguably the most influential comics artist of the time. Instead, the article took swipes at his demeanour and appearance. Kirby went on to leave Marvel after years of Marvel failing to reward him with a better contract and failure to recognise his contribution to Marvel's success. In Charles Hatfield's book *Hand of Fire*, (2011) he describes Kirby's feelings about the situation:

> He felt himself side-lined by Stan Lee's growing public presence, frustrated by Lee's exclusive editorial control over their cocreated properties, undervalued and denied due financial assurances by the company's owners, and denied the freedom to take comics to what was, for him, the logical next step (Hatfield, 2011, p.10).

Steve Ditko's story is similarly one of failure to achieve due credit and highlights the difficulty of defining success within the comics industry. Yes, his story fits in with that of the neurotic. But he was and still today is recognised as being one of the best comics artists of all time.

> Evidence attests that by the mid-sixties Lee was not in full control, in some instances may not even have been mindful, of the overall narrative

direction in either Kirby's Fantastic Four or Steve Ditko's Amazing Spider-

man, as the scope of both series expanded toward sustained, multi-issue

arcs. Yet Lee continued to be credited as the nominal "writer." Kirby and

Ditko, both ambitious narrative artists, chafed under this arrangement,

with Ditko eventually demanding and receiving credit as plotter of Spider-

Man and Kirby finally being billed, ambiguously, as co-creator of The

Fantastic Four (Hatfield, 2011, p.91).

As always, the truth of the matter lies somewhere between the accounts of Freedland and Hatfield.

These high-profile creators and their struggle for success and recognition, while working at the top

of their field, highlights the difficulty in defining what success in the comics industry means.

Therefore, to define success and explore the possible routes of publishing that a comics creator may

choose, it is necessary to look at the following factors:

-Financial Revenue

-Publications

-Readership attainment and influence

-Critical achievements and Awards.

And perchance the most imperative aspect for gaining any or all the above four factors is the

importance of fan consumption, as without sales, there can be no success. However, fans and

fandom are a complex and hugely researched topic; although they remain a key part of the

conditions for and of success, issues specific to fans and fandom will not be discussed here (for an

introduction to this topic, see *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom* [M.A., & Scott, S.2017]).

In Henry Jenkins book *Convergence Culture* (2006), he separated TV viewers by their amount of viewing investment, dividing the audience into 3 distinctive categories. He named the groups: zappers, casuals and loyals to define their varying attitudes to watching TV. For this section, we will look more closely at the category *loyals,* which contains models similarly defined in the concept of fandom. Jenkins says:

> Loyals actually watch fewer hours of television each week than the general population: they cherry pick those shows that best satisfy their interests; they give themselves over fully to them; they tape them and may watch them more than one time; they spend more of their social time talking about them; and they are more likely to pursue content across media channels. Loyals watch series; zappers watch television. Loyals form long-term commitments (Jenkins, 2006, p.74).

From this definition of the term *loyals,* consistent investment of time, verbal social interaction and an emotional connection to the content provides a worthy summarization of fandom and its defined attributes. The idea of fandom extends further with Royer et al (2011, p.292) exploring the concept of feeling part of a niche social group. 'By the late 1960s, reading comic books meant more than picking up a magazine- it meant belonging to an inclusive, participatory and vibrant subculture'

Despite contemporary comic books offering a vast array of styles, subject matter, movie deals, TV series, merchandise, and content, it is interesting to observe that comics fandom could arguably still be considered as *niche*. As discussed in the history of comics, for many decades the comics marketplace was dominated by superhero led storylines and themes. Nonetheless, despite the far-reaching lucrative legacy of the superhero model, being a comic book fan should not imply exclusivity to only superhero storylines. Current comics sales demonstrate that comic book fans

undoubtedly still respond positively to superhero stories by continuing to purchase them, yet sales

of independent series of other genres are significantly increasing (Jackson Miller, 2016).

Perhaps it is the fans and public's tendency to believe all comics are superhero saturated that

makes the media often considered automatically incapable of being viewed as serious fiction.

Versaci (2001) considers that, despite being a false notion, most current television audiences view

comics books as 'subliterate, disposable, and juvenile' (p.63). This notion is further magnified

when a comic book receives acclaim or awards peripheral to comic book fandom. Mainstream

critics will often vigorously assert the medium and its content as something alternative to a comics

book (Duncan, Smith and Levitz, 2009).

Perhaps an aspect which lends itself to the distorted mainstream viewpoint of comics as

disposable literature is the way the comics are published. On 2nd November 2016, in a personal

interview Ben McCloud pointed out:

> In this country, certainly comics are definitely seen as the bastard children
> of the Beano and the Dandy, it's always been associated with kids'
> literature. Of course, you and I know, and millions of other people know
> that comics are incredibly complicated and versatile things. We travelled to
> France together and I remember being told that every French family, if you
> went into a typical house, the grandparents would have their comics, the
> parents would have their comics and the children would have their comics.
> You can get comics about everything, literally everything (McCloud, 2016,
> personal communication, 2nd November).

Floppy, thin and cheap are three characteristics of a monthly US published comics book pamphlet, produced for the marginalised few. Small editions continually releasing monthly issues for many years to gradually unravel a story or extend a world. This publishing strategy incites the purchasing bibliophile to return for protraction of storyline, provide character resolution or extend their personal appreciation of the imaginary world. It takes a long time to release the whole story, and this requirement of perpetual financial outlay reinforces the reader to progress to the level of *fan* or, as Jenkins would define, a *loyal*. The continual drip feed of comics content encourages fandom with the regular expansion of comics content satiating fan's emotional and social investment, promoting the idea that this manner of purchasing comics promotes fandom, irrespective of genre or story. The repeated investment nurtures progression from a casual reader into a full fan.

Publishing protocols notwithstanding, another important factor that encourages fan connection to comics books is the sense of belonging to a social group. The money spent, or the demonstrated continual purchasing commitment, allows access to your chosen society. It is interesting to note that both creators and fans crave a sense of belonging. In a personal interview conducted with Simon Hanselman, he defined his own community, he describes it with an air of pride, yet self-mockery:

> Yeah, but then again people are selling books for like £50 here but they're beautiful books, they're beautifully produced art pieces. These are all hipsters here; these are all arty people buying art books. It's a weird industry, it's like a cult, it's like scientology being a cartoonist, it's a weird group. All my friends are cartoonists, that's how I've met all my friends, I don't know any normal people. Musicians and film makers maybe, but again, weird artists, it's a cult (Hanselman, 2016, personal communication, 27th August).

How comics are produced, circulated, distributed within the marketplace and then bought offers community access. Committing to a comic book run allows reliable admission to the social community set within the comic-book shop and any further social media extensions. Whilst, of course, the act of entering a comics shop provides social opportunities, the comic book itself delivers dependable discussion fodder and conversation openers within multiple social settings. This contrasts with the digital buying experience, in which a consumer can buy directly from online retailers with no physical interaction. Here, the community dialogue is obtained through social media with no physical access or geographical restrictions. It also worth pointing out that some high street bookshops now stock trade paper backs, where the consumer is not beholden to revisit the shop to continue or complete the story. Whereas, to diligently follow a comics series, a comics book reader could potentially visit the comics shop every single week. The following quote from Brothers (2011) aptly demonstrates the positive and personal experience of frequenting your local comics store:

> Going into a comic shop to buy a comic tends to involve speaking to the shop owner, who may have recommendations or warnings regarding the week's releases, chatting with strangers who have picked up books you recognize or enjoy… Comic shops tend to grow communities around them, and those communities are friendly, combative, aggressive, hilarious, and everything in- between. Comic shops serve as social centres. These kinds of regular hobby shop visitations can be viewed as a leisure activity due to the capacity to socialise with like-minded people (Tauber, 1972, p.47).

Diamond is the sole dominant comics book distributor in the USA, organising new releases to be delivered concurrently to shops on a continual weekly basis (Waid, 2012). This reliable platform

for mingling is strengthened by comics always being released on a Wednesday. Implications of never changing the release date means putting aside a specific time to obtain the newest comics edition can effortlessly fit into a weekly schedule.

Another notable place for mingling and further developing a sense of belonging is the comics *convention.* As the whole comics fandom is seen as an exclusive and relatively small faction, the sense of affiliation undeniably ranges outside any specific geographical place or virtual social platform to embrace all comics book fans in one collective identity. This is particularly perceptible at comics conventions and expos where attendees talk of their feelings of being part of the 'same tribe' and amongst peers (Jenkins, 2012). These conventions create the opportunity to unite complete strangers under the common thread of comics fandom.

Fans are not merely considered "the most valued customer...most passionate, dedicated, and actively engaged" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 73), they also provide free labour for media producers who harness fans' attachment and dedication to the text for "word of mouth marketing" (Cochran, 2008, p. 246), a move that has proved financially favourable to the media industry although often at the expense of fan cultural production, as Cochran highlighted in her study.

Comics readers are no longer solely consumers of media, they have evolved into contributors and participants. A popular widespread occurrence of online fan activity is *textual poaching*, wherein fans alter the original media inventing new material inspired directly from it. Poaching distorts the roles concerning consumer and producer by providing fandom the ability to create work constructed by their own understanding of the media (Jenkins, 2006). It also provides a diversion from the day to day normal existence, whilst strengthening any fandom created. Grossberg (2001,

p.52) argues that 'people are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires. The same text will mean different things to different people, depending on how it is interpreted.' A good example of poaching is Fan art, which has also become accepted and admired online thanks to websites like the previously mentioned Deviant Art, permitting users to upload pictures of their creations. Whilst sites such as YouTube see a growth in vidding, where people combine music with edited footage or images to produce a new connotation that was perhaps not present in the original media (Coppa, 2008). Fan fiction is also widespread, where fans write their own stories using characters or settings from the original text.

Historically within the comics industry story, style and content were controlled by huge publishers: DC and Marvel, who managed and dominated the material released for market readership in North America. They were, and to a point still are, gatekeepers:

> The gatekeeper decides which information will go forward, and which will not. In other words, a gatekeeper in a social system decides which of a certain commodity – materials, goods, and information – may enter the system. Important to realize is that gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system but keeping others out (Media, Culture and Society | Gatekeeping).

The positive aspect of these publishing gatekeepers is to provide standards, quality control and consistency. They also have the financial backing to source the best creatives. They are an established institution earning reverence and respect among artists and fans alike. The negative aspect of the Publishing Gate Keeper exhibits itself within their portfolio of editions and payment procedures. This is often visible in the repeatedly limited style and over-saturation of the genre of

'superhero' comics wherein commercial success is valued over diverse narratives and explorative style. While profits can be swallowed up by the publishing company leaving very little revenue, if any, for the creator.

As David Lloyd explained when asked where the idea for Aces Weekly (an internet comic anthology) came from, he said:

> It came from a meeting I had with Pepe Moreno. He's one of the digital pioneers in comics because he did the first Batman book that just used software to produce it. I met him in San Diego and he told me the story about doing a book… and he went to the publisher and said 'ok, where's my cut?' And the publisher said 'I'm very sorry about this but what with the promotion and printing, there's nothing left. So, Pepe decided that this was problematic, there were all these ridiculous costs that were draining money away from the creator, so he decided to set up his own website where he was producing his own comics (Lloyd, 2016, personal communication, 18 August)

Another gate keeper is the comic book shop owner, as a proven fan of the genre, with potential tendencies leaning towards 'egotistical critical grandeur'. The shop keeper can dismiss or display specific volumes to sell in the store dependent on personal predilections. As Roger Sabin points out, a good way to enter the comics community is by using the comics shop owner as a respectable entry point:

> "a simple way to get into comics is to go to your local comic shop and ask the staff what they recommend. I do this now, because the staff are the people that know. They really are incredibly knowledgeable, and I can't think of a better way to do it" (Sabin, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

However, I do believe that many people have over the years been put off by comics book shops because of these sometimes over-vocal and often puritan gatekeepers. This viewpoint is also shared by Zina (2015) on Stitches Media:

> Sometimes, it's the staff of the store. (Actually, frequently it's the staff of the store when you get right down to it.) You'd think that what would be important (if you're oh so protective of the superhero genre and the comics industry) is to get more people buying comics regardless of what they're getting. Especially if you run a comic bookstore. WRONG! When you ask a lot of ladies (and anyone that looks femme or feminine in any way) about their experiences in comic bookstores, chances are that it's not going to be a good story. For every "oh yeah, this comic bookstore was good, and the owner had great suggestions" you'll hear examples like: "the owner ignored me and talked to my husband/male child over me". Or "My comic choices were made fun of in public. I felt like just walking out, I was so embarrassed." Or "He said my books were 'girly' and laughed at them while I was trying to pay for them" (Zina, 2015).

A third gatekeeper is the readers' peers. Those that would cast judgment, ridicule your reading choice, or quiz your knowledge for either kudos or scorn. However, the numerous negative issues experienced from these 'gatekeepers' have recently been annulled by the presence of online and digital comics. No judgment is cast on personal viewing choice. As Adam Cadwell states in his interview;

> I think the perception of comic shops is not quite true anymore. Now there are so many publishers who have a really diverse array of creators. But online is even more inclusive because there are no barriers to it. If you have the internet, then you can find all these different comics by all these

different people and there's no middleman to say what the market is going to like. Most of the web comics grew out of people with a really personal voice telling personal stories in a different way (Cadwell, 2016, personal communication, 10 June).

Often digital comics purchased on sites like Comixology offer previews without purchasing, whilst online comics are predominantly free to view and read. Both of which mean that the reader does not require permission, validation or experience any limitation in their reading choice and accessibility but can in fact validate their reading choice by providing feedback and encouragement to the artist. As Adam Cadwell further explains, it was the readers' support that made him a better artist. "I put a comic strip online every week. That was my self-imposed deadline, to publish something every week. I got feedback and it was really surprising from very early on that it was people from all over the Internet commenting and that was really encouraging and the discipline of doing something every week made my art get better" (Cadwell, 2016, personal communication, 10 June)

The online and digital models offer a more flexible and holistic approach. Plus, the readers and fans of comics are no longer fixed as merely beneficiaries of the content, but now have unprecedented opportunities to design, upload and share their stories for the rest of the world to see.

5.2 Identifying Practical Strategies for Recommendation

This thesis attempts to identify main trends, patterns, and strategies available, whilst standing resolutely within the caveat that the comics industry is fast changing; old formats and submission

guides expire and new ones, with their newly born pre- requisites, emerge. For example, a book

published 10 years ago examining how to break into the comics industry may no longer be as

relevant as a blog posted by a comics professional last week or an interview made last year. That

said, it is fair to summarise any overriding themes that are evident no matter the marketplace or

media: themes such as networking, hard work and perseverance.

McCloud (2006, p.245) states that since he began his career thirty years ago, there are twice as

many markets to consider breaking into, for example webcomics and Kickstarter did not exist until

post twenty-first century.

Currently, prospects of modern-day work can be found via newspaper and comics strips,

alternative small presses, periodical comics books, graphic novels, miscellaneous print and

webcomics. Over the following pages, the thesis will explore each route to the above listed

multiple prospects of employment within the comics industry.

5.2.1   Newspaper and Comics Strips

Some of the biggest ever comics creator success stories have been in newspaper strips. A good

example of this is *Peanuts* achieving annual revenue upward of $80million (Oswald, 2015). That

said, thanks to the information age we are witnessing a steady dwindling of sales in the daily and

weekly newspapers (Greenslade, 2017). This shrinking market has exacerbated greater competition

to secure a recurrent cartoon strip in a paper's print edition. Achieving a contemporary full-time

living as a cartoonist relies upon acquiring syndication. Therefore, the question is: how do you get a

syndicate to publish your work in the first place? Wilhelm Schnotz recommends fully developing

your comics strip before submitting to any possible syndicates. Stating that, "Syndicates require

strips to be mature and fully developed, with a focused concept at its heart and a well-rounded cast of primary characters." (Schnotz, 2018). Syndicate submissions require a couple of pages of strip and character descriptions, as well as a sturdily conceived cast and landscape. It is prudent to aim to produce four to six weeks of sample strips, incorporating 2 or more full-colour Sunday strips. It is worth noting that most strips are drawn using black ink, void of any halftone art, and are double the size of their printed counterpart.

The competition to get accepted by a syndicate is severe, for example the successful Florida based King Features Syndicate receives 'approximately 50 column submissions each week. Of these, less than 1% are selected annually' (King, Submission Guidelines). However, if a syndicate hires your services, the syndicate will purchase the rights to your comics strips, reselling them to magazines and newspapers, delivering you a portion of the profits. Stephan Pastis serves as an example of a comics creator achieving syndicate success. In 2002 he quit his job as a lawyer to become a comics strip creator. Currently his daily strip, *Pearls Before Swine,* can be seen in over 500 newspapers, his popularity is such that he must answer his fan mail "in groups of 100" (Berlin, 2008).

Considering the competitive nature of the syndicate submission process, Pastis is perhaps one of the lucky few. With such fierce competition self-syndication becomes a viable option. A more labour-intensive direction, yet offering greater creator flexibility and autonomy. In this route, one independently submits a strip to comic to editors at individual newspapers. However, it would prove prudent to remind ourselves that the industry of newspapers is shrinking and may continue to do so until obsolete, for greater chances of success other strategies for publishing success need to be investigated.

5.2.2 Alternative Small Press

The independent comics scene producing exciting, innovative and original material employing the services (some unpaid) of hundreds of creatives. Indie companies such as the British *Samu, Nobrow* and *Small Zone* or America's *Fantagraphics,* and *Drawn & Quarterly* publish and distribute a vast array of comics material. The challenge with alternative presses is not necessarily finding compelling material or the production of a comic, but rather constructing a growing, purchasing, readership, which can be a problematic issue when one operates outside of the established distribution routes and publishing networks. These independent small press companies customarily use a variety of methods such as expo stands, websites, email lists, classified adverts and word of mouth to connect with the comics purchasers. Thom Burgess experienced this with his comic *Malevolents*, where he:

> sold through myself, friends, family, and eventually looked to publish online. But in doing so funnily enough it caught attention of a comic publisher called *Geeky Comics*. They effectively picked up *Malevolents* in the end and they published it at several different expos. So, it toured around the UK for I suppose a year or so. Which really helps with exposure (Burgess, 2017, personal communication, 5 January).

It is understandable that this vehicle for publishing may, at times, financially struggle, it has been evident in the past few years that independent comics have played an instrumental and influential role in the industry. Unlike the major company or publisher who work within creative restrictions and commercial targets, indie comics have the freedom to investigate topics and explore themes. As Nicholas Slayton points out:

> Publishers such as Oni and Top Shelf are getting more attention, and independent comics, such as *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World,* have come to the

big screen. …There's been a strong resurgence of independent comics in the last decade. Independent lines are getting more attention as the comics market starts to diversify beyond the grim and gritty superhero or action series that dominated during the mid-1990s (Slayton, 2012).

Drawing our attention back to strategies of success let us briefly explore three main routes within the alternative small press:

-**Submitting to an Independent Small Press company.** Submission guidelines mirror the newspaper syndicate submission, requiring a strong synopsis and multiple examples of work. Specific companies have a preferred niche within the marketplace e.g. *Iron Circus Comics* actively looks for erotic graphic novels whilst *Northwest Press* celebrates strong gay, lesbian or transgender content.

-**Self-Publishing***.* This avenue, like the self-syndication route gives the creator full responsibility, profits and accountability. Minicomics are the easiest form of self- publishing. As Adam Cadwell explains in his interview "I got into self-publishing the way most young aspiring cartoonists do, I made a little comic at home on my home computer and stapled it, then those comics got bigger, I made a load of those. I was spending about two days before every comic show printing, folding, stapling." (Cadwell, A. 2016, personal communication, 18 August) These are smaller than average comics, assembled by hand and (generally) monochrome. An example of a successful mini-comic is Matt Feazells' stick figure *Cynicalman* series produced since the early 1980s. Circulating copies of a minicomic at small expos offers sale possibilities and exposure (Wolk, 2007). Revenue can be expanded further through merchandise at said expos and online.

-***Starting your own Independent Small Press Company.*** The main comics distributers, Diamond

Comic state that 69% of the retail market share in America is owned by DC Comics and Marvel, the

remaining 31% split between multiple small and independent companies (Miller, 2017). The route

of setting up your own comics company is a long- term investment of both time and money but

can be rewarding both financially and creatively (James, 2013). To set up your company, David

Clarke, co-founder of *Off Shoot Comics*, recommends that creators:

> Trademark your name and get the URL for it, ASAP. Someone tried to take
> our name from us back when we first started. Copyright your books before
> anyone hears of them. You don't want people stealing your ideas…. I
> started putting all my free money into the company to get it off the ground
> and to get recording equipment to start doing videos to promote
> ourselves…. Marketing and promotion is everything for a start-up
> company. You go to events and conventions, hand out flyers, go to comics
> stores and maintain a Web presence… start out knowing you need to make
> a book that makes money before drawing the art. Don't draw the book and
> then try and fit in ways to make money (Offshootcomics.com).

This is where crowdfunding could be applicable and useful in getting a new company up and

running.

To conclude, alternative small presses offer strong routes for (limited) exposure and success.

These avenues, if successful, may lead to greater exposure and commissioned opportunities, such

as published periodical comics books and/or graphic novels with established and wide-reaching

distribution.

5.2.3 *Periodical Comics Books and Graphic Novels*

It has been observed from my empirical research that the principle goal for numerous comics writers is to work on a periodical comics book series or graphic novel published with mainstream distribution. However, it is apparent that an uncertainty about the future of the mainstream comics industry sits with foreboding gloom upon a sample of the creatives. As Ben Mcloud explains:

> the comic industry is at a crossroads. It seems to have been up and down and declining generally for years and then movies came along of course and rejuvenated it but I've heard from different people in the industry that certain comics don't make money, that the films make all the money and the merchandise makes money and that's not a great situation because if the films stop, if you have had enough of them, where does that leave the comic industry? You've got an industry that might be based on revenue from other areas so if it can't sustain itself, who knows what's going to happen afterwards. (Mcloud, 2016, personal communication, 2 Nov)

Despite the gloomy outlook, it is evident that continuous commissions are still available within the comics marketplace. Here are four proven routes that may lead to a possible commission from a publisher of any size.

-Head-Hunting. The publisher notices your body of work elsewhere and contacts you with a publishing commission in mind. Simon Hanselman is a good example of how this can happen:

> I put stuff on Tumblr in 2012. I put everything on Tumblr and after a couple of months' publishers started writing to me. I'd had hundreds of pages of work that I had been working on in secret and I just dumped it all

on this website and it just kind of took off, low level viral I guess

(Hanselman, 2016, personal communication, 27 August)

-**Submissions.** Using Google search, a comprehensive directory of large well-established, medium sized and smaller independent publishing companies is available to review. A selection of the publishers listed are small and may be the ideal choice for a first break. Independent publishers are more willing to take a chance on a new writer or artist then perhaps, a bigger company like DC and Marvel, however be prepared that some will not publish anything beyond their own projects and in-house artists e.g. Offshoot Comics. Getting a big break with a well-established publisher whether small or large can still offer a minefield of challenges, for example in Ben's interview he talks of his first commission with *2000AD*:

> My first work with *2000AD*, I was very excited… and then I get a phone call
> a few weeks later from Andy Diggle… and then he said, the thing is we had
> a new colourist in to work on your inks… he said I'm afraid he's made a
> right fucking mess of it… So that was my first piece… the editor himself was
> phoning up to apologise. And sure enough it was an absolute fucking
> mess... You couldn't see any of the ink lines underneath because the colour
> was so garish and thick that he had literally destroyed my work (Mcloud, B.
> 2016, personal communication, 2 Nov).

Ben noted that valuable lessons were learnt from this experience: *"*put it this way, you can't have too precious an attitude towards your work. If you're working with people, then you have to be prepared that it will change." (Mcloud, 2016, personal communication, 2 Nov)

-Expos Portfolio Review. Selected comics expos offer the opportunity for industry professionals and novice comics creators to meet and engage in portfolio review sessions. Expos such as *Comic-Con International* offer established companies such as established comics publishers, movie and TV studios and videogame companies to look at work. However, as Jason Fabok (2011) of DC states the lack of preparation by creatives can prove problematic:

> one part of a convention that seems to drag by is when an aspiring artist asks for a portfolio review. I don't mean that to sound like I hate looking at portfolios because I really don't. But what's frustrating is the fact that out of maybe 20 portfolios that you see, one person actually took the time to research what goes into a good portfolio The worst is when someone defends their work saying, "Well, I didn't get to spend as much time on that page as I would have liked." Really? Then why is it even in your portfolio? Most of the time I see portfolios filled with everything from pages to covers, to concept sketches to inks, to colours to everything. I can't stress it enough: If all those pieces are junk it doesn't matter if you have 100 pages, it's still junk (Fabok, 2011).

Fabok goes on to state two important points: one- displaying only 5 or 6 pages of a great comics book story is enough; two- keep to one aspect of comics book design, for example, if you want to be an inker only show your inking, not pencil drawings or lettering as well.

A portfolio review, if well prepped, offers an occasion to communicate with industry figureheads face to face, gain valuable feedback, professional critique and build working relationships with business professionals.

-Networking. With the emergence of internet technologies numerous portals for exposure and networking within the industry are available, these include comics conventions, social media, blogging, vlogging and forums. The qualitative data indicates that 'getting your name known' is critical. Who you know and who knows you within the trade industry can be paramount to success, as Dave Clarke from Offshoot states, "He introduced us to another artist and all the other artists came throughthat person. I wish meeting people was as easy as meeting at a comics club but, no, all our artists and writers except one have come through personal referral'. (Offshootcomics.com) Industry peer recognition and perseverance are constructive attributes to success. A good example of this can be seen from my interview with Thom Burgess and how he procured Reece Shearsmith to write a foreword for his *Malevolents* (2015) comics.

> With Reece Shearsmith for instance… I have for a long time been a fan of The League of Gentleman, anything Reece Shearsmith related. So, I sent him a copy and funnily enough it was through doing a podcast via a friend Dan Baines. He was in fact friends with Reece then followed me on Twitter after I did the Podcast. So I was able to direct message him and I was able to ask him if he had received the comic and he said that he hadn't but he really wanted to read it. I sent him a copy and he loved it. He was really kind and shared some images on his Twitter and so on the back of that I wondered if he would be interested in doing a foreword and he was really generous and agreed to (Burgess, T. 2017, personal communication, 5 January).

Networking is a pivotal component to success; it is therefore advisable to utilise this strategy as and when appropriate.

5.2.4 Miscellaneous Print

Comics art skills transfer well to commerce and illustration. Building a personal website and social media presence can be a catalyst for multiple commissions/project that may not land directly in the comics book categorization but are paid work, as Roger Sabin points out:

> There are all sorts of different markets in this world. I was talking to someone just yesterday about Gallery Book shops. Where they will sell hundreds of thousands of a graphic novel but it will be about Van Gogh or something. And it becomes yet another subset of a bigger thing. So there are all these divisions (Sabin, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

Divisions aside, joining an established publishing house or illustration agency is another route to work. Within a reputable agency, commissions could be unearthed in avenues such as comics strip illustration for non-fiction and fiction, advertising campaigns and manuals.

This may not be a direct route into the comics industry, but does it matter if a successful career being paid to draw/write is still a successful career, no matter the industry title and commerce? In Roger Sabin's interview, he further explains that "If you are making artwork that has the potential to appeal to… possibly separate groups then the range of ways its being put out increases and the ways you have of reaching those people goes up too" (Sabin, R. 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

5.2.5 Webcomics and ecomics.

With the rise of the Internet, 'success' is available in webcomics and ecomics. Starting up a

webcomic is no easy quick fix solution.

> Webcomics are a business -- it takes about three years before you know if
> you are going to be successful. Some people are lucky and their business
> takes off running from the git-go, but for the rest of us it's usually a long,
> hard, slog to get to the point where our business is actually supporting
> itself, and us. Some webcomics never really become that successful, but
> the author/artist decides to persist because it is a source of work for them,
> either by referrals or as advertising for their artistic services *(Flying*
> *Chipmunk Comic* Press Website).

As *The Flying Chipmunk* representative points out, benefits from a webcomics are not solely

financial they offer advertising and catalysts to other paid work. *The Flying Chipmunk* provides a

comprehensive list containing 55 ways not to sabotage a career in webcomics. Within this list are

insightful statements such as: "Webcomics are advertising, not a product. They are about building

an audience that trusts and likes what you do." And "most new viewers to your site only spend 45

seconds on your site. You must catch their interest in that time." (Flying Chipmunk Website) Both

declarations offer astute insights into the precarious tightrope that must be traversed when

searching for success in webcomics.

According to journalists and creatives such as Lauren Davies and Jason Brubaker, beginning a

successful career in webcomics has 'never been simpler'. There is no one specific route to making a

webcomic, nonetheless, when starting out primarily in webcomics it is imperative to develop a

realistic expectation of success. From remembering Flying Chipmunk's previous statement, 'it takes

about three years before you know if you are going to be successful' (Flying Chipmunk) a measured stance on initial readership figures and financial success is applicable here.

The creator's dedication to the art should override any initial financial targets. From my research, the prevailing conclusion is that webcomics are a long-term strategy for success and any monetary revenue, fame or notoriety, require lengthy commitment and far-reaching goals. That said, committed online contributions can build a loyal fan base, as Adam Cadwell notes:

> There's a big online comic community out there who share links to everyone else's comics. You can quickly build a readership. If people know you will post something every week and you stick to it, it's reliable, more and more people come because they know that if they enjoyed that strip, they'll come back another day for another one (Cadwell, 2016, personal communication, 11 August).

This stratagem for long-term financial success is of a contradictory direction to ecomics. A good example of a successful ecomics site is Tapastic, showcasing over 2000 comics creators. Here the financial reward is immediate. The public pay to view or download a comic. Merchandise and advertising no longer serve as essential revenue streams. The limitations within sites such as Tapastic arise with questions of exposure. How to get your comics noticed when over 2000 other creators are simultaneously producing work? Possible conventional solutions point towards social media, consistent new material, a strong concept, solid characters, and compelling story arc.

Web and ecomics are, by classification, comics that occur online within the web. Due to technological advances, innovative opportunities of storytelling become possible in a way that is

impossible in orthodox printed comics. "We're still a long way off from achieving the living, moving newspaper pictures and paintings that you've seen in *Harry Potter*, but did you know all of those things are possible on the web right now?" (Enzo, 2015). With reference to opportunities such as an infinite canvas, interactive possibilities, animated gifs, and reader driven storylines, these opportunities all point towards currently underutilised, yet diverse experiential reader involvement.

5. *Conclusion*

Currently there is an industry monopoly of Marvel and DC, whose working practice involves hiring a relatively limited few for maximum sales, underlining the importance of identifying other routes to comics industry success. Practically speaking how does the new generation of comics creators make a successful career in today's current landscape? I hypothesize that today's comics creators need to take a multi-stranded approach to work in the comics industry. It is now not enough to have a comic with a compelling narrative or striking artwork. Today, creatives need to understand some of the key principles involved with marketing and advertising as well. The rise of the internet has shrunk the world, signifying the demise of geographical limitations, allowing viable creative partnerships to exist across the globe. Adversely, the competition for work is global, too- where previously English writers and artists would collaborate for an English publisher, now it is common practice to see the writer, artist and publisher based in different countries. The positive outcome is the expansion of audiences/fandom on a global scale.

Historically, being part of a local publishing company was a sure fast route to comics book achievement, contrariwise this classical passage is no longer the sole path. I theorise that advances in software, publishing and the internet are offering previously unseen opportunities in self-promotion and sales. Comics creators require multiple professional skillsets within their practice, as not only artist, but agent, publisher, distributer, and promoter- all vitally playing equal roles in procuring and evolving a successful career in the comics industry. The advantages of this 'one-man-band' are autonomy, expressive freedom, and self-sufficiency. The disadvantages are the workload, commitment, and necessity to succeed in areas such as marketing, web building and branding with no gatekeeper to regulate the quality of work produced.

The investigation has highlighted avenues that enable creatives to achieve success within the comics industry, of which the internet has provided a valuable tool for exposure, communities, crowd funding and direct sales. Empirical evidence indicates that many fans and creators deem a printed graphic novel or periodical comics as a more significant and recognised symbol of success. The initial desire to make work is the biggest and most significant first step towards a personal sense of success. In my interview with Adam Cadwell, he states, "People ask how do you break into comics and it's simple, you do some work and you show people, you do some more work and you show people and don't be rude, be friendly and open and opportunities will arise from that" (Cadwell, 2016, personal communication, 11 August).

The rise of digital comics, ecomics and online viewing platforms offer multiple routes for audience review, readership, and feedback. Digital comics are now accepted as a growth

sector for the industry. Mass use of computers, phones and tablets allows increased optimism about the digital format from patrons and online retailers alike. This positive experience extends to the comics industry as a whole; witnessing a healthy coexistence of print and digital, as Mark Waid explains...

> A year or two ago, when readers (new, old, and lapsed) began reporting that reading comics online spurred them into stores, we considered that to be anecdotal evidence that there was a positive symbiotic relationship between the two…. today, we have hard data to back that up; every shred of evidence goes to show that one does not 'steal' from the other (McMillan, 2013).

The webcomic and the periodical issue offer opposing qualities, for example, the reading experience of webcomics has both its positives and negatives, as Roger Sabin discusses:

> I think maybe with a tablet there's the opportunity to be greedy and sort of binge. So, you can read as many comics as you want in one go. Whereas in the old days you would have to wait a week, 2 weeks… and if you're following a character over time, that's really important. There was an academic called Charlotte Brunsdon who wrote about TV series and she came up with this phrase 'the joy of forgetting', which is the space between the stories. There is something very profound about that. You kind of forget but you remember the basic character and what they do and there's something about seriality that's really important (Sabin, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

His fellow academic John Miers concurs, discussing some of the hindering physical aspects of reading online:

I think the fact that you view one page at a time. I read on screen a fair bit these days but if I'm reading a CBR file I'll always set it to display 2 pages simultaneously. There is something about that bottom right panel in a spread, or the top left panel being somehow privileged, having these mini cliff hangers. That thing where if I'm reading a comic where I'm really excited to find out what happens next, that thing of turning over and deliberately not looking down here because I don't want to give myself mini spoilers and that kind of thing. So, there are these aspects of the reading experience itself that I think are lost from the lack of physicality (Miers, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

The empirical evidence gathered in this thesis indicates that both reader and creator hold strong nostalgic feelings towards buying a comic in print. As Owen Clarke, a lifelong long comic book consumer explained:

With regard to digital comics, I've never really ventured far into it. I've had a look at a few of the sites. I'm reading what they are giving for free just to see if I like the medium. I much prefer the tactile reading rather than clicking. I've seen some good ones where they have added an element of movement into the digital comic. But then it's transcending the medium, moving out of comics into animation (Clarke, 2016, personal communication, 18 October)

Whilst David Lloyd, creator of *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989) and the online *Aces Weekly* (2012) points out:

It's because in comics, collecting is important. Comics are put in plastic bags to keep them pristine. People keep building bookshelves for them. It's completely different to magazines and newspapers who are all rushing to go digital now. Comic collectors can always be relied on to collect and I wish that was different (Lloyd, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

Again, this theme of the tactile experience, of holding a tangible object, is a recurring idea that David Lloyd is hoping will change: "I'm just hoping that people will let down their guard, not be so addicted to paper and things will change" (Llyod, 2016, personal communication, 18 August) Will this attitude change? Is this a generation shift? Roger Sabin and John Miers discuss this point further. Sabin begins by raising the question of age and digital usage, "Well it might be generational you see. I'm not digital native whereas my students are and for them it's a much more natural experience to read something like that. So, I'm always wary of thinking this is just my viewpoint, my age" (Sabin, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

Miers replies:

> I think that there is something to that but then I would necessarily assume that graduate age people are always privileged to digital. A lot of students at Kingston seem to be really keen on the resurgence of the hand made. For example, when they reach the end of the course and they write their artist's statement I see so many times people emphasising the value of tactility. The value of mistakes, accidental marks made when dealing with watercolours and screen-printing as opposed to tablets and Adobe Illustrator. So, I think especially in terms of those making artwork the 'old ways' are still held in very high regard (Miers, 2016, personal communication, 18 August).

The positive experience of handmade objects (whether memorabilia, merchandise, and printed comics) allows for ownership, occipital and tactile enjoyment, this is in distinction with the positive experience of digital comics allowing for unrestricted access, occipital enjoyment and limitless content. For some, the practise of searching, buying, collecting and viewing creates a holistic experience that is emotionally more rewarding than story content alone. The qualitative data collated from all interviewees indicates that there is no set path to success.

How one experiences internal success is a personal unfixed journey. As this thesis has repeatedly

demonstrated there is no fixed pathway, instead multiple routes offer multiple opportunities to

enter an expanding and evolving industry that is far from dead.

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7.Appendix

7. 1 Interviewee Biographies

Dr Roger Sabin

Dr Roger Sabin is a Professor at Central St. Martins in London. His primary teachings are on Popular Culture and Media. His published works include *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art and Adult Comics.* These pieces of literature are seen as being integral to anyone wishing to study Comics at an academic level. Sabins' knowledge on, not only comics, but popular culture and fandom make him a key speaker and fantastic addition to the documentary. His expertise on the subject will help tackle many aspects of my research question. Being such a prominent person within the comic industry, I am hoping that he may also be able to introduce and pass on some other key contacts. One that he has already suggested is John Miers.

John Miers

John Miers is a lecturer and researcher working alongside Roger Sabin at Central St Martins College of Art and Design. With 16 comic publications under his belt, and exhibiting regularly over the past 10 years, John is not only a current practitioner of comics but is currently undertaking a research based PHD within the genre.

Ben Macleod

Ben Macleod is a writer and artist that has been in and out of the comic industry for the past 15 years. He has been attempting to balance home life, work and creating his own comic for the past few years. He has not ventured into the online realm and has attempted to create a large volume

so that when it is released in can be done so as one complete story. I will be able to discuss with Ben the trials and tribulations that he has experienced in trying to create a comic in today's publishing world. Would it not be easier if he posted it online? Why does he need a publisher?

David Lloyd

David Lloyd is one of the UK's leading comic Artists. Most famously drawing V for Vendetta. He has recently set up a new comic art magazine that is digital only. Called ACES WEEKLY. It is a weekly publication that includes serial episodes and short stories in seven-week volumes. Showcasing some of the world's leading comic artists. David Lloyd says himself that 'We're like the Sunday pages, delivered through your screen instead of your mailbox. Thrillers, sf, drama and humour in weekly bite-size chunks, looking luminescent and cool on any of your devices…'
Aces weekly has won the Best Digital Comic prize in Pipedream Comics annual poll, Best Web-Based Comic in the True Believers Awards, and recently been listed by Best Web Comics in the 100 Best Web Comics Of All Time!

Simon Hanselman

Is a comic's creator from Tasmania. His comic series *Megg, Mogg and Ow*l are published by Fantagraphics after he was discovered on Tumbler. Hanselman regally cross dresses at comic conventions. He informed me that this was part of what is necessary in order to raise one's profile and stand out from the crowd. His series has won two Eisner awards and is a personal favourite of Roger Sabin.

Thom Burgess

Thom has been a Graphic Designer for most of his adult life. He has always had a passion for reading comics and in the past few years this passion has turned into more of a career choice. He has established himself as being one of the UKs cornerstones for horror and ghost stories information. Using Networking and online profiles to great effect

Many of the interviews conducted were not used due to time restriction to type up all the transcripts and recognising that some of the information was repeated these included Dr Vince Miller who is the Senior Lecturer of Sociology and Cultural Studies at the University of Kent and Canterbury. He has numerous publications on the importance of Digital Cultures and new media. One of his key interests on the subject; community and belonging. I interviewed him to have his opinions about the shifts in comic fans; from people that go to specified and designated shops to those that enjoy online communities in contemporary urban spaces on camera. But when it became a written MA it felt that I could refer and quote from many books and other theorists, then be limited to one academic.

The interview transcripts on the following pages are selected from the numerous interviews that were conducted. The transcripts have been typed up to include the key discussions on success and therefore do not include the full conversations from the interviews.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS: 2 Speakers

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: **I**

SIMON HANSELMAN: SH

I: How did you get started?

SH: I was living in Tasmania, a small child with a junkie mother, a weird upbringing and nothing to do in the shitty town so I started drawing comics. It was cheap, as a poor child, pens and paper are very accessible. Friends of mine went into film stuff but I couldn't afford that. You can create a whole world on paper, it's a great hobby, like Peter Pan I never grew up. I just kept doing it forever until something finally clicked.

I: So it wasn't a planned career, it was a hobby that grew?

SH: It was a goal, I always wanted to be published by the time I was 30 and I ended up signing the contract with my big American publisher the day before I turned 31 so I just made it. The dream came true. People say you can't make money in comics. It is kind of true but if you play your cards right you can. I'm very flamboyant, I do a lot of cross dressing and stuff so I dazzle people with that online. I think you have to be a gregarious personality. You have to do good work and also be a good marketer in a sleazy way. You have to be the whole package and sell yourself. You can make good work, like Chris Ware, he's really famous and a millionaire now, he's very shy and self-deprecating but makes really good work and people respond to it but I feel that I have to over compensate in other areas. Also try to entertain people on the internet.

I: That's very interesting about having an online profile. Did you start putting work out on the web?

SH: No, I was too poor to have a computer growing up, I've only had a computer for the last three or four years. I put stuff on Tumblr in 2012. I'd always hated web comics, I didn't like the idea of giving away work for free and just generally don't really like web comics. I put everything on Tumblr and after a couple of months' publishers started writing to me. I'd had hundreds of pages of work that I had been working on in secret and I just dumped it all on this website and it just kind of took off, low level viral I guess. Viral in comics is 1000 people are seeing your shit. Keep working hard. I'm a workaholic, all I do is work, hide away in the room all day. It's my escape, it's art therapy, this shit is all that really makes me happy, it's my entire focus in life and now it's paying the bills.

I: Beforehand were you doing the small press thing of making it and stapling it?

SH: Yeah, at 8 years old for some reason, I don't know where I got the idea, I would go to the local news agent, use the copy machine and make these little magazines and sell them on the playground at lunch. I dropped out of high school because my teachers said that I couldn't just make a magazine and sell it to people. I thought that was stupid because there was the Riverside Gazette, a small press newspaper in the community, of course you could make a small press magazine thing. So I dropped out, worked shit jobs, there were really good government benefits for unemployed mentalists in Australia so I would go to a therapist every month, get free money from the government and just make comics and hone my craft. It's just about the time you put into it. I sold many comics for years at gigs, I played music as well and then finally put it on the internet. It's all working out ok. Now I'm just waiting for the decline, the crash, for it all to plateau and all down hill from here. Currently going ok.

I: **Who's your publisher?**

SH: Fantagraphics Books in the US. They're doing their 40th anniversary this year. I've had a poster of theirs on my wall since I was 13 and now I'm like part of the family, I married someone who works there.

I: **Did they email you to join?**

SH: Yeah, I was always to scared to submit anything. I thought they would think it was shit. But based on stuff I put on Tumblr they wrote to me and said they liked it. They thought this guy seems kinda popular now and we can make money out of this, we can sell this. 13 different languages now, I have 13 different publishers. I went to Russia last year and got mobbed at Russia Comic-Con and that was weird. 10 countries last year. I'm from a terrible family in Tasmania and no-one has gotten out of Australia and I've been to all these places just from comics, it's quite magical. I normally dress up for these festivals and look like a pretty lady but it's too hot.

I: **Would you go back to just doing small press stuff?**

SH: Yes, I'm still doing small press stuff. I just did a 28 page book for this. All the kids are doing this Risograph stuff so I did a bit of that. Web comics for Vice. I started selling T-shirts. That makes a bit of money, people like T-shirts.

I: **Do you read comics and purchase stuff as-well?**

SH: Yeah, I've stopped reading them in a way because I buy so many. I have a massive library. I tend to buy them and want to read them but there's no time and I'm a workaholic. You have to treat art like a sport in some way, you have to train like an

Olympian, you have to be aware of what's going on, you have to compete, it's a sneaky way to think about it but you kind of have to. If you want to make a living out of it you have to really work hard. My mother taught me that, she worked 5 jobs. She had a work ethic and she imparted that on me.

It's entertainment, a lot of this stuff is very arty. I like the arty stuff but I also like the entertainment. I think of myself as a comedian or a comedy writer, I'm trying to entertain people. I think I'm a bit more mainstream than some of the people here. I'm still in with these people, all the stuff I like the most is weird, avant-garde stuff.

I: It must be nice to write what you want and not have an editor saying you have to change things?

SH: Yeah, that the great thing about Fantagraphics who are an established publisher, there's full autonomy for me. They trust me, I hand in the work, they say maybe you could change these pages and I say no and they're fine. I've had TV people writing to me saying that maybe they could make a TV show out of this but I don't really want to do that. You're working with 50 people and you can't show smoking on TV and my comics are all about smoking! I love the freedom of comics it's a pretty small market. I sold 2,500 copies of my first book and it was a New York Times best seller, I find that weird. Sales are down due to the internet. It's all changing. People pirate my books, whatever, as long as people are reading them. The whole landscape is changing with online, similar to the music industry

I: It seems that because there are so many free online comics, people expect comics to be free.

SH: Yeah, but then again people are selling books for like £50 here but they're beautiful books, they're beautifully produced art pieces. These are all hipsters here;

these are all arty people buying art books. It's a weird industry, it's like a cult, it's like scientology being a cartoonist, it's a weird group. All my friends are cartoonists, that's how I've met all my friends, I don't know any normal people. Musicians and film makers maybe, but again, weird artists, it's a cult.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS: 3 Speakers

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: I

JOHN MYERS: JM

ROGER SABIN: RS

JM: I'm John Myers, I'd say I'm a practitioner theorist of comics, I make comics, I study here at Central Saint Martins, I'm in the final year of my PHD in Comic Studies which is practice based. I also teach here a little bit on the CCC courses as an academic support lecturer and I'm also a lecturer at Kingston University on the BA Illustration Animation.

RS: My name is Roger Sabin and I work here at Central Saint Martins along with John and I guess my connection with comics began when I was a kid but I used to write about comics when I was a journalist in the 1980s. Then I did some books about comics in the 1990s and since then I've been teaching about them. I'm a journalist, then a lecturer and a historian as well, so that's me.

JM: I should also say that Roger is my PHD supervisor and the reason that I actually applied to Central Saint Martins to do the PHD was because I'd read the books that he just referred to.

I: The big orange Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels?

JM: The big orange one, which is exactly what I think of it as.

I: Both of you touched on reading comics as a child, do you remember some of your earliest influences in reading comics?

RS: Yes, I grew up in the 60s and 70s so I think the collection I had were these little

pocket sized war comics, Commando library, things like that, terribly racist and I loved them and had a collection of them and I think they were my earliest things. But I did have comedy comics as well, things like Buster and The Beano. Then a little bit later on Look and Learn was an awful thing, big sort of child's newspaper really with lots of educational material and that was grim. My parents bought me the Buster, which was crap and they bought Look and Learn at the same time so you know, that was my growing up.

JM: The first comic I can remember buying regularly was Whoopee!..

RS: Good choice, good choice…

JM: In as much as you could be said to be making a choice at the age of 4 or whatever it was. For some reason, I went for that over the Beano although I was also a member of the Dennis the Menace fan club and Desperate Dan Pie Eaters Club. But actually, one of my very earliest memories is based on comics. So in Whoopee! there was a character called Toy Boy who loved toys, which would have distinguished him from all other children obviously! There was a great story because I thought those comics, I guess all British kid's comics have always reflected a bit of class warfare. So Toy Boy often came into conflict with a wealthy friend who had all the toys that money could buy but he didn't enjoy his toys in the imaginative way that Toy Boy enjoyed his. So there was this Lego competition and the enemy kid obviously could just afford all the Lego and he turns up with whatever he's built, the Mary Celeste out of Lego, or he's had his servants do it. Then Toy Boy turns up and he's just got this lump. The other kids are laughing at him and then Toy Boy's mate turns up and he's also got this lump of Lego and this keeps happening throughout the strip and the rich kids go 'these are all rubbish'. And then in the final few panels all of Toy Boy's working-class mates get together and they all put their lumps together and it makes a life size speed boat and they collectively win and I thought this was just amazing. And I can remember copying the last panel of this comic

and really proudly showing it to my Dad. So I've been reading comics literally for as long as I can remember anything.

RS: That's a great story. I think they give you a false view of life. You don't actually walk into a doctor's waiting room and see somebody with a saucepan stuck on their head! But that's another story.

I: I certainly remember mine was the Beano, sometimes the Dandy but always the Beano. Recently they've done it so that the Beano is now online, almost only. Children are reading a lot more on iPads, I think it's really missing something, getting that comic and that magazine…

RS: Well I think the history of comics is that around 1905 you would have this idea of pocket money coming into general use and so the kid would have a Saturday penny they could then spend on a comic so it became a consumer group. Therefore, they could make a choice about what they were reading and that's really important when you're 8 and so I guess that still pertains when you've got a tablet you know, you still have to buy it. But it's not the same and I think you do loose something when a comic is not tactile.

JM: The memory that I just described, absolutely, that's bound up with, I think it was 25p a week that I got as pocket money, this was in 1982 and Whoopee! was 8p I think. There was maybe a 5 minute walk down to the local newsagent and so all of these things did go together to having, perhaps for the first time in your life, some regular sense of agency… I've got this money, I can spend it on what I want and this is what I choose to spend it on. So I think that's an important aspect that you don't have to go anywhere to get the stuff, it's kind of lost. But there are, I suppose on a more formalist level, significant differences to the way that a comic is read, in particular the loss of spreads I think when you're reading on screen. I think the fact that you view one page at a time. I read on screen a fair bit these days but if I'm reading a CBR file I'll always set

it to display 2 pages simultaneously. There is something about that bottom right panel in a spread, or the top left panel being somehow privileged, having these mini cliff hangers. That thing where if I'm reading a comic where I'm really excited to find out what happens next, that thing of turning over and deliberately not looking down here because I don't want to give myself mini spoilers and that kind of thing. So there are these aspects of the reading experience itself that I think are lost from the lack of physicality.

RS: I think maybe with a tablet there's the opportunity to be greedy and sort of binge. So you can read as many comics as you want in one go. Whereas in the old days you would have to wait a week, 2 weeks… and if you're following a character over time, that's really important. There was an academic called Charlotte Brunsdon who wrote about TV series and she came up with this phrase 'the joy of forgetting', which is the space between the stories. There is something very profound about that. You kind of forget but you remember the basic character and what they do and there's something about seriality that's really important.

I: **How do you think online comics are changing Gate keepers in terms of comic book shops?**

JM: I think it depends on what extent as a vister to a comic shop you want to be acknowledged by the staff there. And some shops are welcoming places to people outside a young male demographic certainly Gosh comics is a fantastic example of this.

RS: Yes it depends what shop. Forbidden Plant was always a bit 'tits and bums'. But Gosh comics has always been very careful to be inclusive. And would display indie comics predominately for instance. So it does depend which shop you went too. That's the first point to make. The other thing is that the readership changed. The big change was in the mid 90's with Manga. Which was being read by young women, in quite large

numbers. And nobody had foreseen that. And so all of a sudden you had this new readership and they had to be catered for. And I think for me that's when the big change came in really.

But a simple way to get into comics is to go to your local comic shop and ask the staff what they recommend. I do this now, because the staff are the people that know. They really are incredibly knowledgeable and I can't think of a better way to do it.

I: Do you both still visit and buy from comic shops then rather then online?

JM: In general yes. Although I would say online has and its true for everything online has taken up a bigger slice of my purchasing then it used to. But the single purchasing experience were I will come away with an arm full of comics will be something like a small press fair or Thought Bubble or whatever. With those I would come away with piles and piles of things. To some extent a trip to Gosh I am probably more then likely to have a particular think in mind. But as Roger was saying I will equally have a chat with the staff to see if there's anything that they highly recommend at that time.

RS: I don't read very much comics on tablets and things. But I will probably go into a comic book shop and say 'Ok whats funny?' as im interested in comedy comics. And also im interested in horror comics. That's my two favourite genres. And they will tell me and ill hit on some great things. But online you can look up charts of what other people have said, 'top horror comics for the past five years' and then you will go onto something else like Amazon and then you buy it. But I would never read it on the screen I would always buy it to have, a printed copy.

I then discuss a Korean horror comic that's digital in with the panels can flicker and go at speed through to each panel.

RS: I think there is a lot of this. Motion comics is the phrase that's been used. And so like you have said its multimedia art. Its like animation. Sometimes they have soundtracks. Is itr still a comic? I don't know. Its difficult to say.

JM: I'm not sure who said this but 'if it remains primarily read rather then watched it's still a comic.' I think motion comics at present are not that well regarded. I think there have been many very unsuccessful experiments. So then when you get a good one, as you can imagine lots of my social media is full of cartoonists. And there is a French artist called Boule and he did a motion comic that was only a few pages. It was basically a static comic but there were a few animations in the background. A train journey, with the pattern of light shining through the illuminated windows past the landscape at night. That was animated, but you still had to read it. It just added this kind of flicker. I remember seeing lots of people commenting that this is how you do a motion comic. Its just added this little extra thing and it couldn't live in a non-digital space. But it very defiantly a comic it has panels, speech balloons etc.

I: I have seen some digital comics by the likes of Electicomics and Madefire where you can click on the moving parts in the comics and it takes you down a new path. A bit like the 'old choose you own' stories.

R- I have attempted some of these digital and web comics were you click on a panel and it takes you to one avenue of the story. You click on another panel and it takes you to another one. All sorts of experiments as John mentioned, and I'm not really a fan. Id much rather be lead through a story by a skill cartoonist, you know? From beginning to end. That's the fun I get out of comics. I'm sure that they will improve and there is a place for them. And they are quite big now aren't they?

JM: They are, I cant think of any of the top of my head though. Jason Chikas Meanwhile come to mind as quite an interesting example. And maybe the i-pad version of Richard Mguires Here from a few years ago. But maybe its telling that both of those examples started life as print books. And the print book of meanwhile is this gorgeously complex unwieldy object and that's part of what makes it so nice. In the printed version there are all these tabs and you have to flick back and forth. Where as in the i-pad version you tap and it al joins up. I think its well done but something like that you can trace back to as you were saying the multiple narrative stories. Look at Carl that Scott McCloud does in Understanding Comics. Where he talks about the different paths that Carls life could take. Those are there not so much as comics but 'here are some things that we could do with the form' and people are still testing that territory I guess.

I: **Yes and I can't think of, or see how, anything that's been created that will have the immersive qualities as say Chris Wares' Building Stories?**

R- Well it might be a generational you see. I'm not digital native where as my students are and for them it's a much more natural experience to read something like that. So I'm always weary of thinking this is just my view point, my age.

JM: I think that there is something to that but then I would necessarily assume that graduate age people are always privileged to digital. A lot of students at Kingston seem to be really keen on the resurgence of the hand made. For example when they reach the end of the course and they write their artists statement I see so many times people emphasising the value of tactility. The value of mistakes, accidently marks made when dealing with watercolours and screen-printing as opposed to tablets and adobe illustrator. So I think especially in terms of those making artwork the 'old ways' are still held in very high regard.

I: **Do you think therefore that the delivery of the comic would have an impact on the demographic?**

JM: I don't know I think I would be tempted to say that the demographic is probably going to be defined more by the content and the genre of the comic more than the mode of delivery. If we are talking about a superhero comic and not getting into stereotypes, but if we imagine the types of people interested in superhero comics, then that's going to be the overarching thing whether we are talking about reading a pamphlet or reading via Comixology. Similar if it's a literary or experimental comic that's being serialised as a web comic or that's being put out on Fantagraphics. I think between those two groups we would still see a greater split in groups then we would between print and digital.

RS: That's a great answer. You do get groups of fans that treasure the handmade and tactile and you get other groups of fans that are completely digital. This question about demographics, its too hard! What he said.

I: **Haha. Yes, I've noticed a few webcomics have made the jump and are now being successful translated into comic form. Nimona as an example. Where you had a free to read comic via Tumbler and it is now available for around £10 to purchase via Harper Collins. So you'll have fans that loved the series and want to own the tactile object and they will be hoping to attract new readership.**

RS: Yes, if you went into a Waterstones there are people that would never ever read a comic via Tumbler. So yes it is a new market in that sense. There are all sorts of different markets in this world. I was talking to someone just yesterday about Gallery Book shops. Where they will sell hundreds of thousands of a graphic novel but it will be

about Van Gogh or something. And it becomes yet another subset of a bigger think. So there are all these divisions

JM: Yes, that's an interesting point because when we talk about comics being sold in shops there are in fact many different ways in which that can happen. You mention Van Gogh. I first saw and purchased a Van Gogh graphic novel at the Van Gogh museum in France on Holiday. I may have bought it in Gosh. But that fact its in a museum means that there is a particular interest group there might perhaps not have an interest in comics that might come into contact with it and buy it.

I suppose somebody like Daryl Cunningham for example, as somebody who has gone from blogging into official publications and produced a lot of factual comics, Psychiatric tales, Science Tales and recently much more political work. You can trace the way the community has changed there so it started within an online comics community. Then started to get re-blogged found praise and then people began to take an interest in it because they are interested in the subject matter, not because the are essentially interested in comics. If you are making artwork that has the potential to appeal to distinct people that are in possibly separate groups then the range of ways its being put out increases and the ways you have of reaching those people goes up too.

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: **I**

ALEXANDER TUCKER: AT

AT: My name is Alexander Tucker, I've just published a comic with Breakdown Press called World in the Forcefield. I'm also a musician as well and have been doing comics on the side for quite a few years but the past couple of years I've been concentrating on comics a bit more.

I: **Did you get into comics because you're an artist?**

AT: I've been into comics since I was really young so comics is probably one of my first passions and then I got into fine art.

I: **Did you create stories and then try to find a publisher?**

AT: Yeah, I used to publish an anthology with an ex partner of mine called Sturgeon White Moss and this was a lot of underground stuff, American stuff, European things, a few British things. That ceased in about 2005 and I'd started a few comics in there. So I'd   finished off one called Shandor and then I'd started this one and so I think Breakdown are going to publish Shandor as well.

I: **How did you get attached to BreakDown?**

AT: Tom Oldham from Breakdown Press comes to some of my band's gigs, Grumbling Fur, and I think I popped into Gosh a few times and they were playing some of our music. Got chatting with him and he asked me to come and be involved in the Safari Comics Festival that they run. Then when I started doing World in the Forcefield I just

thought well they'd be perfect, so I just got him over to the studio and Tom was like, **(?)** love it.

I: **Do you find working with them you're allowed to finish the whole story?**

AT: Yes, they have a lot of say on the cover and just the general aesthetics of the books but it seems like if they like you as an artist they trust you. I guess it's difficult with comics isn't it, because the work's already done isn't it? You can't really say the writing's not really too great here because you go back and it's kind of, well for me anyway personally, once it's done it's done. I'm kinda like that with the music and albums I do as well. It's very rare that a record company will be like, we don't really like that track. I'm kinda like, well this is it, you guys like it you can work with me, if not, well maybe not.

I: **Where would you like your future to go, music or comics?**

AT: Yes, so I'm carrying on with this, I'm half way through the second issue. The other comic I was telling you about, Shandor, that's waiting in the wings, that's like a 60/70 page graphic novel which will hopefully, probably come out next year. The next issue of this maybe will be at the end of next year, or the beginning of the year after, I'm not sure.

I: **Do you have any say on when and how its distributed?**

AT: Yes, they've got distribution, I'm not sure who's distributing it at the moment, I just hear little bits of what's going on. I think **it** might be helping them out, I'm not sure, I'm not certain.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS: 2 Speakers

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: I

OWEN: O

O: My name is Owen Clarke and my first experience of comics was the Beano and Dandy at a very early age. When I first discovered the comics I really liked, I was 17, I found some Amazing Spiderman comics. The artwork on the front made them really attractive. I got a subscription and it was amazing!

I: How do you feel about digital comics?

O: Nobody wants to wait anymore; everybody wants to watch their boxsets all in one. It's the way it's going, it's definitely what's going to happen. It's a shame because going to an actual comic book store and thumbing though them is great. There's things like smells involved and people in there and that is missing from the digital comic.

I: Some people may say that there are positives, going into a comic book shop can be intimidating for a woman, or it it seen as a teenage male environment.

O: It's still seen as a kid's thing. I think that that stigma all comes from, when storytelling as a picture driven media like a comic, when that first came out it was for children. But it's a medium for a storyteller and if you grow up with them as a child then you appreciate that medium and it grows up with you. Comics have grown up with me and have matured as I've matured. There are comics for adults fully that are not for children. It's a stigma that people who don't like comics have but it's just another medium.

I: Did you have any particular series that made you love the medium at 17/18?

O: I was reading Spiderman comics and loving the Marvel artwork and then the Hulk was the next thing that I fell in love with. It fell out of favour with me for a little while as I was busy and not reading as much but then somebody said something to me about a comic called Preacher which was, as an adult, the first real graphic novel that I read and that was an eye opener. Today that still remains my favourite comic, it really is amazing. I have followed Garth Ennis's career and have made a point of going back and looking at the things he did before. If you chart his progress through comics it's the same maturity. It starts with the childish things and then progresses through adolescence and then adulthood.

I: **What's great about him is that he is able to intertwine messages.**

O: I think his forte is human nature and not a blown up idealistic version of human nature. Even the heroes in his stories are flawed in huge ways which is how people are.

I: **Was that buying the graphic novels as a set?**

O: At the time I just ordered them from the internet, I got them one by one as I I read them. I still have a signed comic.

I: **Do you buy most things you read online as physical copies?**

O: Yeah, I do now because it's convenient. That's not to say that I don't like or still visit comic shops because there's a certain thrill in thumbing though old comics that you might not have seen before. But just for convenience sake, you order something and you can have it there the next day.

I: **Do you still pay for stuff or do you read free downloads?**

O: With regard to digital comics, I've never really ventured far into it. I've had a look at a few of the sites. I'm reading what they are giving for free just to see if I like the medium. I much prefer the tactile reading rather that clicking. I've seen some good ones where they have added an element of movement into the digital comic. But then it's transcending the medium, moving out of comics into animation.

I: **Have you been to any comic conventions?**

O: No, I want to go to some good ones but there's a lot of weird people there!

I: **Comics aren't just for children and they're not just superheroes.**

O: Not at all, I mean look at the diversity in comics, you have things from Alan Moore's redoing of Swamp Thing up to Marvel Zombies. There's a huge world of characters and it's all so different.

I: **I do think people forget that you have autobiographical comics. They're all telling really hard hitting stories. They're not mentioned much.**

O: The internet is great for many things but it's very hard to find your market when there's so much available. Film producers are having the same problem. That's why you have so many remakes as an audience will already know it. For new artists it's hard to get to the people who want it as it's difficult to sift through things and find the things you will like. A few of the web comics I've read are ok but nothing special.

I: **I interviewed Roger Sabin and he said that for every bad comic that gets published he has a thousand at home of fan made ones. Just because anyone can do it doesn't mean they should! I thought that was interesting.**

O: It becomes saturated and you don't know who is good and so you stick with conventional things that you know and stop being adventurous.

I: **Which is probably why superheroes have lasted.**

O: Yes, it's a tried and tested thing, easy to relate to. It's hard to find good things.

I: **You get Batman in so many different guises. There's the kid's version, the retro 66 version they've brought out, people who want to see the dark… every box has been ticked.**

O: I quite like that, variations on a theme. I've got Batman stuff, alternative stuff like Batman as a vampire. I think that sort of thing is interesting as you know the source material and giving it a twist gives it a new perspective. I got a little bit crazy about Marvel Zombies for a while. It's good to see characters in a different environment or setting.

I: **They try that with their big things too… Green Lantern.**

O: People gravitate also to people on trusted sites with huge followings. That's the way of the world now. Instagram, all those things, if you have followers then people take notice. I don't really understand it but you have to keep up with these things. You either adapt or die, it's a changing world. It's all going to be electronic at some point.

I: **David Lloyd is frustrated as he can't get people to subscribe to his Digital comic anthology at the moment. Is it too soon?**

O: I think nobody wants to pay for anything. Especially online and art. People have

an objection to it. They just want to see it and appreciate it. No-one wants to contribute. Despite the amount of work that goes into it. I don't know what the answer is. There's a book called Private Eye. If you want to view it online it's set up that you can view it for free and then just pay whatever you think it's worth. But I think that's the only way to do things now. If you put a price on something it will stop a huge number of people watching it. If you let them decide whether it's worth some money or not, eventually people will have to start giving some money. You're blocking off a huge percentage of your audience if you put a price on something before people can view it.

I: There are so many places to get free stuff.

O: Whatever you do now someone's gonna put it online and then everyone is going to get it for free. You may as well do it yourself and then hope and pray that people will contribute towards what you are doing.

I: It's interesting the people who have uploaded on Tumblr, got a large number of followers and then have been picked up by a publisher.

O: Followers and through word of mouth, through giving stuff away for free you can get known. Then once people know who you are and they're comfortable with what you're going to give them, then you can charge for things and garner more respect.

I: There's a level of internet entrepreneurship you need to nowadays.
O: You have to have a real online presence. If you don't keep up then you're going to sink. It's all very well being nostalgic but if you don't adapt you die.

I: It's not only the readers that need to embrace technology but also the artists.

O: Absolutely. You have to sacrifice year's of work for free to perhaps get paid for

stuff you might do in the future. Artists have always had that problem. Everyone wants them to do things for free. I guess you just have to get over it and get on with it.

I: **Is there anything that comics have made you do?**

O: Oh yeah, the reason I started drawing was because of the artwork in Marvel comics. I got How to Draw the Marvel Way and that's what I love doing. I find it easy doing that now but I love doing it. My Mum's an artist so I drew quite a lot anyway. It was the dynamics and movements of the superheroes, that's what got me drawing.

I: **Have you ever considered putting anything on for free?**

O: It's tricky because I've written a couple of stories that I've been trying to convert into comic form. It's a tricky medium to get right. It seems simplistic because you've got picture and words and box after box and it seems formulaic but it's not. There's so much that you have to say in the panels and you have to pick the right things to leave out so that the reader can connect the boxes. It's tricky. If you write something then you can write it out full form and no-one has to think about it because you've written it all. But when you're doing it in a limited medium, when you only have a certain space to put so many words and you have to put exactly the right things it's tricky. I'm still trying. I'm still coming up with ideas but not having any real experience in writing a comic it's difficult to transfer to that medium.

I: **With the number of books on how to do it, you do realise how much skill is involved.**

O: Yeah, it's incredible. It's a very variable medium. There's so much variation in how you do it and how you can mess it up. It's a difficult thing to do. I think I have it in

me, I'm going to keep persisting. I have loads of good ideas but I need the time. I'm

drawing quite a lot at the moment as I really want to specialise in animation. That's a

link between online comics and cartoons. That's where I want to be.

DL: My name is David Lloyd, I'm a comic creator and my claim to fame is V for Vendetta.

I: **Can you tell us a bit about where the idea initially came from?**

DL: It came from a meeting I had with Pepe Moreno. He's one of the digital pioneers in comics because he did the first Batman book that just used software to produce it. I met him in San Diego and he told me the story about doing a book which was a back-end deal and he went to the publisher and said 'ok, where's my cut?'. And the publisher said 'I'm very sorry about this but what with the promotion and printing, there's nothing left'. So Pepe decided that this was problematic, there were all these ridiculous costs that were draining money away from the creator so he decided to set up his own website where he was producing his own comics. The idea of having comics online without those ridiculous costs which also restrict the freedom of artists. So I thought I'd like to do that. The initial idea was to put something on Pepe's website, get a bunch of artists together to tell their own stories. When I got an editor involved, he suggested we have our own brand. I initially wasn't happy with that as it seems like it was going to be more work, but it was good idea. It turned out to be a lot of hard work, more than I imagined but it still is and was a better idea. So Aces Weekly was born. Aces Weekly is an anthology like the old British comics used to be, an anthology of various stories. It's called Aces because everybody in there is an ace. After seven weeks it forms a volume. Those seven weeks often tell a story arc. It's a mix of serials and short stories, so you have some humour, a bit of science fiction, it's a mix. It's also similar to the Sunday Pages in America. So in a sense we were bringing back two traditions that have now

faded. The Sunday Pages and the traditional British comic which no longer exists. You subscribe to it. It costs you £1 a week and you get at least 20 pages. There's a two week break between volume. There's no paper involved, it's all online.

I: I think it's crazy that people put up barriers towards it just because it's digital.

DL: It's because in comics, collecting is important. Comics are put in plastic bags to keep them pristine. People keep building bookshelves for them. It's completely different to magazines and newspapers who are all rushing to go digital now. Comic collectors can always be relied on to collect and I wish that was different. I wish people would value the story more. We are providing great stories which are instantly available. They benefit because they get 200 pages for £7 and the creator benefits because there's nothing draining the cost from the creator. I'm trying to establish a situation where the creator gets most of the money. I need our subscriptions to be higher so the creator gets even more money. Part of our philosophy is that creators have the freedom to do whatever they like which is not given to them in any other form of publishing. We have loads of good contributors who want to take part but people are resisting for no reason. If we were charging a very high price I could understand their resistance but if you're charging a great price I see absolutely no reason why they should resist. So I am constantly trying to defeat the resistance there is to digital delivery comics. The comics are not produced digitally, we just scan the art to the right specs and off it goes. Digital is easy to do, we publish it on a laptop and that's it. The day before it goes live we can slot artwork in because it's just a file. You need a skeleton crew and great contributors and that's it. I'm just hoping that people will let down their guard, not be so addicted to paper and things will change.

I: How do you find contributors? If somebody was talented and wrote in, would you use them?

DL: Well there's two ways in which we get contributors. Either I see somebody and invite them or people submit stuff. We have more than a few people who just submit stuff. I see samples first of all and if I like that I ask them to send me more stuff and they do something for us. We are open to anyone, we don't need credentials. Also, because we have no boundaries, which is a great thing, we can go anywhere in the world for contributors. We have people from Poland, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, everywhere. We have everybody, we have a global cast. Anybody from anywhere who sees what we're doing and wants to take part and contribute can contact us. As long as you're willing to accept the tough market that we're dealing with. The only qualification is that they're an ace!

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: **I**

ADAM CADWELL: AC

AC: I'm Adam Cadwell and I'm a cartoonist, I write and draw a series called Blood Blokes with is about lazy vampires and I self-publish that series as well.

I: How did you get into self publishing?

AC: I got into self publishing the way most young aspiring cartoonists do, I made a little comic at home on my home computer and stapled it, then those comics got bigger, I made a load of those and then when got too much, I was spending about two days before every comic show printing, folding, stapling I had to look into more professional modes of printing like community printers. Someone else printed my printed my books and I learnt a lot. You can share information in the comic scene to find out how to make professional looking comics nowadays. You're in control of everything and you get all of the profit back. It can be quite an addictive thing. I've been doing it for years now. My first issue of Blood Blokes came out in 2012 and this year I published a hard back book of my old web comic.

I: Can you tell me more about the web comic?

AC: The Everyday was an observational auto bio comic strip, it started as an experiment and I put a comic strip online every week. That was my self-imposed deadline, to publish something every week. I got feedback and it was really surprising from very early on that it was people from all over the Internet commenting and that was really encouraging and the discipline of doing something every week made my art

get better. That discipline teaches you so much about wiring and how the comic format works. It's a very affordable way of starting out in comics. You have no print costs, you can put something online and have thousands, potentially millions of people see it. There's a big online comic community out there who share links to everyone else comics. You can quickly build a readership. If people know you will post something every week and you stick to it, it's reliable, more and more people come because they know that if they enjoyed that strip they'll come back another day for another one. That's a great way to start. People ask how do you break into comics and it's simple, you do some work and you show people, you do some more work and you show people and don't be rude, be friendly and open and opportunities will arise from that.

I: There seems to be an emerging fandom for online comics.

AC: I think the perception of comic shops is not quite true anymore. Now there are so many publishers who have a really diverse array of creators. But online is even more inclusive because there are barriers to it. If you have the internet then you can find all these different comics by all these different people and there's no middle man to say what the market is going to like. Most of the web comics grew out of people with a really personal voice telling personal stories in a different way. People who wanted to do really long stories and weave in and out of things, or people who wanted to do really short story arcs and I think publishers at the time wouldn't have printed those stores thinking the market wouldn't buy it. But a lot of those web comics have become hugely popular and now some of them are being printed. Those weird and different comics. If your work is good and you put it online you can become really successful.

I: You did the Art work for the BBC news report for the Hatton Garden Job. How did that come about?

AC: I was referred by a friend of mine who is an illustrator as well. He was offered a

job and it was just before Christmas and he couldn't do it. Like I said, if you're nice to people and friendly…. He thought Adam would be great for this so he put my name forward and I got the job that way. It was a very interesting job as I had to stay very specific to the known information in the court case while it was still in court and not glamorise the criminals. So it was a very particular tone and style of story telling which I had to shift my style to. I think it went down very well on the BBC News site. I even had phone calls from guys who had seen it and found my number on my website saying they really liked it and it was different. I think that traditionally hand drawn comic style of storytelling isn't something that BBC News viewers would have seen very often and wouldn't have thought it as a way of explaining what was going on in a current affairs crime story. But it did work and they were surprised by that and enjoyed it as something different and that was very rewarding. A big new audience saw my work, got it and enjoyed it. I think I did my job well as an illustrator because they learnt more about the case and enjoyed the process of doing it.

I: What is the next project for you?

AC: I'm doing the last issue of Blood Blokes which is number six which concludes the story. I'm going to pitch it to some publishers and see if a publisher would like to work with me on a book collection. If not, I'll do a Kickstarter and self publish it as I know how to do that and then afterwards I'd like to do some kid's stories. Something more all ages friendly, less realistic and a bit more cartoony and imaginative just to flex some different muscles.

I: Do you buy comics?

AC: Yes, not as much as I did. I think the more you make comics ironically the less time you have for absorbing other ones. I read them as a kid and loved them. As a teenager I didn't really know what was going on in comics and then when I went to Uni in

Manchester I found comic shops there and discovered all these different comics. I realised that comics don't have to be kid's things or superheroes; they can be anything. Some really surreal stuff. A whole world of comics all at once in the comic shop.

I: What do you think are some of the biggest benefits of this technique?

B: The fact that you can go back and undo things I think is massive. Especially if like me you don't always get it right first time. Also I tend to work quite physical so I tend to almost carve into the paper sometimes. You don't really want to do that of course. Paper is only so thick even if you get the Bristol Board. I've ruined quite a few drawings over the years from over zealous scribing shall we say.

I: Is that your art, or is that to get lines and things on the page?

B: No I think it's just partly getting really into it and I suppose my wrists are too strong, who knows why that is eh? But yeah, it's something I have to be conscious of. The other thing of course is as you get on, having spent years drawing and wiring and things, you can develop problems with your wrists, your fingers and things like that so having this makes me, I'm worried about damaging the screen so I'm not quite as physical when I work on here which is good.

I: Is this piece one that you've put together as fan art?

B: Not really fan art, it was a piece to try and get work really with Marvel. I went to a

couple of comic conventions with it but unfortunately it didn't even get seen at the one took it to because they cocked something up with the portfolios, which was good of them. Which is a shame because I thought it was quite a nice piece really. Never mind.

I: **So was that having to go to a convention and show the piece?**

B: Yeah, so artists will go to a convention and you get the opportunity to hand your folders in. Unless you're a top artist you won't get preferential treatment, like all the other artists and fan artists you have to just submit your portfolio, somebody comes and looks at it while you're in the bar trying to socialise with the editors and if you're lucky you'll go and have an interview with an editor. So that's kind of how it works normally, but it's very unusual for anyone to get work just from that process. It seems to be like in many industries it's very much who you know, that's really how it works.

I: **Yeah sometimes you see at conventions competitions where they say "fantastic, we're having a completion and so and so is looking at work" but the reality is that's almost more the gimmick to get people in.**

B: Yeah, I think that's probably right yeah. It's understandable I suppose, they've got seats to fill, they need to make money but I feel sorry for some of the artists. Especially the ones who, there are always a number there who, not being unkind, but they're never going to be a professional artist you know. I wouldn't want to put them off trying but sometimes it's really obvious that they're not going to make it, at least working for some company like Marvel. Yet nobody will say that to them which I always think is a bit sad really but I suppose it makes them happy and who's anybody else to tell them they can't try. I guess the other thing is we all have to start somewhere.

I: **Yeah, I remember when we were in Angouleme and we were queuing to get seen by one of the people there and there was somebody in front us and they were**

showing what they were about to submit and it was pretty terrible stuff.

B: Yoy would like to think that somebody would say just stop wasting your time. Or at least tell them you're only ever going to be an amateur or keen enthusiast or something like that I think could cushion it I guess. But then these guys, the editors at the conventions, they're not there to offer psychiatric help.

I: **It seems that years ago you would have been forced to submit like that and that's the only way to get in touch with big companies. But in the last ten years the internet has changed that. Is it possible to submit things online? Is it that a lot of large book companies, a lot of them don't even take submissions?**

B: Yeah that's true actually, it has changed a lot. You can get seen or noticed online I think more but I think even there it's hard to get yourself seen. If they don't want to see you they won't and these people are still incredibly busy, I think that doesn't change.
But it certainly gives you more avenues and I think if you're clever you can think of a way to get work seen. You can create a stir and somebody will say something to the right person or be it themselves so yeah, it definitely has changed.

I: **With not having constraints with editors you can publish work online in styles that might not have been published in shops before. Noelle Stevenson, put her webcomic onto Tumblr. Which eventually got picked up by Harper Collins.**

B: Yeah well that's the thing, isn't it? It doesn't have to be impressive technique. If the idea is strong enough then I suppose that's good enough isn't it? I guess there are different levels of abilities, I think that's fair enough. In some ways I wish I had a simpler style of drawing because it would be a lot quicker. I have often thought that but you are what you are so it's very late for me to try and change that.

I: So with regard to drawing a one page comic, how long would you estimate that would take you and the time you work?

B: Something like this which is a double spread probably took me about three days, but   that's what I imagine it would be. The reality is it's probably about four or five maybe and with all the faffing around and changing things it probably was around five days. But this is a really highly detailed couple of pages and most comic pages perhaps wouldn't be quite so full of detail. I think there are artists out there that work incredibly fast and they can do a couple of pages a day some of them but again the style would be very simple and that's not to say it's worse, it's just different you know, more minimalist shall we say. But for something like this, there aren't many people that can do a page in half a day. Just the sheer level of work required, the number of strokes means you're looking at a day at least for one page. I think the industry and for fans or up and coming artists there's the idea that you have to do a page a day, every day for however long it is. But of course often what happens is, on a run, they'll have two artists so you don't have to do a page a day. It probably helps but you know our mutual friend Mike, he can do a very quick turnaround and I know that that's how he got one of his early jobs because he was there, he was ready to fill in quickly and work very quickly and of course that endears you to an employer. If you're able and you can produce the work to schedule then it's obviously going to do you well.

I: I can't remember who it was, he started drawing Hellblazer front covers, Glenn Fabry..

B: I think he was the first, I don't know if he was ever actually the first one was he? I know Kev O'Neill, he had a go I think. But certainly Fabry, if he wasn't the first one he made it his baby. A bit of gossip, I think it's well known that he was a bit annoyed when Bisley did so well with it because he felt that it was really his baby for a while there but anyway, I don't want to get into gossip.

I: **Quite interesting because my lecturer has given me an interview that he did with him and it kind of sounds like that on that. But he was saying how, oh no it wasn't him, apologies, I was going to say he got into it by being quick at that kind of thing but it wasn't him.**

B: No, he's notoriously slow, he will probably tell you himself that. He's frighteningly slow, brilliant obviously, I'm not going to say that he isn't but he's quite famous for being very slow but he gets away with it because his work is fantastically good. Sorry, I interrupted you.

I: **It was Disraeli, he got work by being asked to go in, I think he said the position was something like a fixer upper. There might be two artists working but having a deadline and saying I can't do it, so he got called in just to help with two or three pages that can't be done otherwise and that's how he got work.**

B: Yeah I think that's definitely a way in isn't it? I remember my friend Neil George, years ago he was working on something, I can't remember exactly what it was, Superior I think it's called, is that a character, yeah I think he's called Superior isn't he, he's basically a version of Superman isn't he? I was in touch with him at one point and he was having trouble finishing it and he was quite a quick artist as well but even he was struggling. At the time he was saying that he was going to get me in as, as you say, a fixer upper, a finisher offer and unfortunately it didn't come to pass which is a shame.

I: **Would that job opportunity come just because you already know him?**

B: Yeah, well that's the thing. Well I was a combination actually because at that time I'd had an interview with one of the DC editors and they had really liked my work so my name was known around the DC and American comic circle at least with regards to

London and that comic convention. So I think the editor he knew, knew the editor I'd been interviewed by so I wasn't a sort of nobody, I was a sort of almost somebody at the time. Or someone that could be brought in but absolutely, it was primarily because Neil knew me and then he could vouch for me I guess but as I say, either he didn't vouch for me or it didn't happen anyway.

I: Yeah, tough market.

B: It is, yes, they all are I guess but you have to be philosophical about it don't you?

I: Have you ever thought or looked at putting stuff directly online and seeing if you can get gravitas there?

B: Yeah, I sort of did and I'll continue to I'm sure. I've got some more stuff to go up I just haven't put it up for a while but like a lot of artists I'm working as well because you can't rely on this unless you're very successful. That makes it very hard to keep things moving and going all the time. As you know I have a seasonal job so in the summer I do very little in the way of artwork because it's quite demanding work I do but every winter I get a chance to crack on and get some more done. So yeah, I will put more up there but I think you have to get a momentum going and the problem is in the past I've got stuff up there, people have noticed it and maybe told other people and then I disappear every summer so I think I have to learn to be a bit more consistent and put stuff up maybe a bit more regularly.

I: The stuff you're putting up, it's a portfolio kind of piece isn't it?

B: Yeah, one offs and comic work as well. A graphic novel that I've been working on for a long time. It's easier to do the one off pieces of course because they don't take as long and there's not the expectation that comes with… if I wanted to put a comic up

online, people would naturally want to see page after page and read the story so then you have to commit to getting it done each week or each month and I've not really been in the position to do that. But doing single pieces is a bit easier because you can have a bit of fun. Do one piece, put it up there and as I say, the weight of expectation isn't the same. It's just basically getting the portfolio online that way.

I: Do you have a blog or a website?

B: I have a Facebook page, most of it is still on the Facebook page and I like Twitter because   it's nice and easy, there's less hassle involved with Twitter, you can put images up, people can have a quick look and they don't have to get too involved. Whereas Facebook I find can suck up your life like some evil online demon but I guess, again, if you're going to use it as a business tool that's something that you sort of buy into and treat it more like a business, a job, rather than a social tool. It's all the old friends isn't it Will? The bastards that you never want to see again pop up from nowhere, the other side of the world sometimes, you think what the hell do you want?

I: I recently been using Hootsuite. You can use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and some other social media platforms from ones page and you basically just get the messages that come to you or notifications. You could switch off having to have all of the useless stuff so you just reply to important things

B: That sounds pretty good.

I: Yeah, so you can't see anything that you don't want to basically. It's a very business model of reading all of the messages that would come up.

B: That sounds good. They're all coming up all the time aren't they? It's keeping up with it   all Will, it's keeping up with it all.

I: **And that's the thing, it does seem to be that there's always some new way of doing it. Like I was saying earlier about Simon Hanselman and how he uses cross dressing to be noticed raising his online presence isn't really there.**

B: Yeah, that's a novel way of… yeah… but I suppose in a way it's quite current. You know you have Cosplay. It's a phenomenon isn't it that's been growing for years and it somehow seems quite apt, it fits in with what's going on with comic conventions. It's all about dressing up and creating a different identity and somehow, he's tapping into that isn't he?

I: **Yeah, I hadn't really thought of that, it's very true.**

B: He sounds like an interesting guy.

I: **Yeah, I'll show you my interview with him at some point.**

B: Yeah I'm not sure I would go to that length, I don't think I'd look very good in a dress anyway. Not that I've ever worn one of course.

I: **From thinking about comic conventions and how there's a lot of cosplay now, did you go to conventions a few years ago and find that they had a very different atmosphere to them? Now that there's a lot of kids and a lot of women attending, do you remember it being solely older men?**

B: Actually the first conventions I went to would have been early 90's I think and I was still pretty young then and there was hardly any cosplay at the time. Hardly anybody dressed up and when they did it was mainly Star Trek it seemed. It was more about crossing over film and TV shows, like a crossover of Sci Fi and comics because

perhaps the investors and backers I think didn't really believe that comics generate too much money. Mainly men and a lot of fans, whereas now you do get a lot more girls there which is a good thing.

I: **When I interviewed Andy Diggle, I asked him what do you think the internet has improved about comics and one of his first points was how it has diversified comics for all.**

B: Andy Diggle yeah, he's the guy that gave me my first bit of work with 2000 AD actually. He's a nice guy. He phoned me up, here's a sad story, you can start playing the music now… My first work with 2000 AD, I was very excited, I think I was 20, 21 something like that and I did the work, got it in on time and then I get a phone call a few weeks later from Andy Diggle and I think oh what's this and he says Ben, you're work's going to be out in this month's edition. I thought oh that's good, I'm excited to see what it's going to look like and then he said, the thing is we had a new colourist in to work on your inks. I thought right okay, he said I'm afraid he's made a right fucking mess of it. So that was my first   piece. I went from looking forward to it to being told that it had been absolutely ruined and he was apologising, the editor himself was phoning up to apologise. And sure enough it was an absolute fucking mess I have to say. You couldn't see any of the ink lines underneath because the colour was so garish and thick that he had literally destroyed my work. So yes, that was fun, I don't hold it against Andy Diggle though, not much.

I: **Do you have a copy of it?**

B: I think there's a copy of it around somewhere yeah, don't ask me to dig it out. I could look around in a bit and see if I can find a copy and you can stick it on there for the world to see. Yes, evidence.

I: **Did you continue working or was that kind of…**

B: Actually I did get more work with 2000 AD, I got a few more stories with them so yeah, it didn't totally ruin my chances but in terms of first work it was a bit unfortunate.

I: **That's horrible.**

B: Yeah it was. I mean to be honest the stuff that I did wasn't brilliant but then I suppose it wouldn't be if it was the first thing I'd ever done professionally so I was still learning at the time. But it was half decent, it did deserve a little bit better but yeah, there you go.

I: **That's the thing with that kind of thing. You don't have complete ownership I suppose. Whereas with your work now, when you're doing the comic that you're trying to make or a portfolio picture you have start, beginning, end ownership.**

B: Yeah, in a way it taught me something quite valuable like you say, you can't go into comics I think expecting your work to be… put it this way, you can't have a too precious an attitude towards your work. If you're working with people then you have to be prepared that it will change. It doesn't mean it's always going to be worse but I do know other artists who have produced incredible work sometimes and then it has been ruined in a way by other artists so it does happen. But yeah, it's a medium that involves more than one person. I think if you're lucky, if you're bloody good you can get to the stage quite rightly I suppose where you get to say. Of course there are many artists out there that produce their own work, ink their own work and colour their own work but unless you're really fast or you have the luxury of taking a year or more to do it then you won't really succeed I think, that's the thing isn't it?

I: **Yeah, it's that first step in the door isn't it?**

B: That's right, you pay your dues don't you? You have to kind of earn it I guess.

I: (*Looking at a piece of artwork by Ben referred to earlier*) **Maybe I should edit out the colourist nam?.**

B: No, put his fucking name in there. That's the one, look at it, it's fucking nothing isn't it? Awful. It's like I say, sure it wasn't the best work in the world, but it was alright. It's so bad, it's just so bad. Everything about it was just disappointing, all the choices of colours you know? The choices of the cop uniform colours is wrong. Everything just looks awful. You just can't even see it, he just blocked over all of the line work with thick, dark, chunky, horribly rendered, well not even rendered colour. I have to say, the bastard, how dare he do that to me?

B: (*Looking at another piece of Ben's work*) Space 1999 isn't it? I ripped off Space 1999. Obviously a rip off. Well, the front is a little bit Thunderbird 2 I would say.

I: **Would you do that with drawings? Pick bits of reference like that and put them together?**

B: No, I didn't actually, but it was clearly in my mind because they were called Eagles weren't they in Space 1999, maybe you're too young to remember the series, an awesome 70's…

I: **No, I'm aware of it…**

B: Very slow moving but it was really cool. But no, I didn't actually consciously do it but clearly it was there. Here's another story, a different story I did where I did some other ships that were more original but I didn't ink this. It was Robinson I think it was,

he's quite a famous inker. Yeah, Cliff Robinson. It's quite nice but a bit different to the way I would have inked it.

I: When you first got into comics, was that from just going to newsagents and buying them?

B: That's a very good question. I don't know actually, I just happen to have a comic here from very early on. This is perhaps one of the earliest I have, I would have been five. So when I got that I don't think I would have been going to newsagents. Although times were different then. I don't think there were comic shops, certainly not in England then. I can vaguely remember seeing comics in the newsagents, there was a little shop in our high street called Mrs Hamm's and it was a shop of everything. It was two shops knocked together and she had Airfix models, comics, food, metalwork, just everything. But the toys were there, lots and lots of toys. Occasional Star Wars figures coming out as well. I think you could get comics from there. It was all American stuff, Spiderman, Batman, Superman. But tragically at a certain point we moved house, my Mum gave away all my early comics. I must have had some pretty old comics back then and they're all gone. I was annoyed with her, I still have psychological issues I think. Loads of them, bags of lovely comics.

I: If you could own them now, would you?

B: If I could own them now, would I? Only the ones that were worth anything. I don't know, they take up a lot of room don't they? That's one of the problems with collecting anything, you end up with stacks and stacks of stuff and quite honestly you don't look at it for years and years and then you just pull it out every now and then so probably not. I tell myself   that I had Spiderman number one in there and that's what I blame my Mum for. She's cost me a lot of money.

I: I had that for years with figures and my Mum gave away all of them and we

went to a cousins house a few weeks afterwards and there was Wolverine's arm and they'd snapped off two of his things so he looked like he was swearing and I was like, no.   So for years I couldn't talk to my Mum. But then I went to my Mum's house and in the attic there was a box of old toys and I was like, I'm not taking these home with me. They can just sit here. But for years I was like, I can't believe you got rid of them all… oh you saved them.

B: Yeah, well I've got Star Wars toys, I kept them, now Sennan's got them, my son obviously, but I do tell him off when he breaks them. I'm trying to let go, trying to let go but no, it's more important if he has fun. Even if that means removing Han Solo's head or whatever it might be.

I: Does Sennan read comics?

B: He does, yeah, he's got in trouble for reading my comics. He's 10 and his mum, Angela doesn't like him reading the darker stories. We have a disagreement on that as I think a lot of men and women do about violence in stories or comics or movies. I think she, like some people argue that violence propagates violence so if you're exposed to it in a film or a comic or whatever it is then you're more like to go and and copy what you're read or seen. I tend to think that that's nonsense. But there's a debate that rages on about that and probably will do forever. But Sennon's been told off, I've been told off.

I: What's interesting is you get some people who would argue that comics are for children and you've had issues with your son reading comics.

B: Yes, that is interesting but obviously some comics are for children, I mean certainly the Spiderman Annual I showed you earlier, it's tame, it's really tame. It's a bit like what came first, the chicken or the egg, did our world change because people were reading

violent books and watching violent movies, did the violence come first and then the arts reflect the violence? I think the second one is more likely. After all you watch movies about all sorts of things, you don't go out and do whatever the movies is portraying. So I tend to think that art is a mirror that reflects. I suppose there is a bit of a two way process but it's funny. In this country certainly comics are definitely seen as the bastard children of the Beano and the Dandy, it's always been associated with kids literature. Of course you and I know and millions of other people know that comics are incredibly complicated and versatile things. We travelled to France together and I remember being told that every French family, if you went into a typical house, the grandparents would have their comics, the parents would have their comics and the children would have their comics. You can get comics about everything, literally everything.

I: 50 Shades of Grey was predominant, if you went into Tescos to buy a book, it would be 50 Shades of Grey or Jacqueline Wilson, that was what you were getting. Whereas if you went into France you've got 100 and something different comics. Grandma's got a comic, son's got a comic, everyone was catered for.

B: It was a real breath of fresh air, seeing the passion and hunger for that medium out there as opposed to generally what you get here. It's a very incestuous business over here, it might be changing a bit, obviously you've got cosplay and different youth coming into it. But it is very insular here, I'm sure you've probably found that yourself. Although there are lots of people who read comics or have at least come into contact with comics, it's not a huge phenomenon here and I'm not sure it ever will be to be honest. I think the damage was done. Having said that, I used to love the Beano, Whizzer and Chips, awesome stuff, brilliant stuff.

I: Dennis the Menace…

B: Desperate Dan and some of the artwork was brilliant as well, the pen and ink work

was fantastic so it was great. But I think unfortunately that has etched itself onto our psyche, maybe it will change eventually but my view is that the comic industry is at a crossroads. It seems to have been up and down and declining generally for years and then movies came along of course and rejuvenated it but I've heard from different people in the industry that certain comics don't make money, that the films make all the money and the merchandise makes money and that's not a great situation because if the films stop, if have had enough of them, where does that leave the comic industry? You've got an industry that might be based on revenue from other areas so if it can't sustain itself, who knows what's going to happen afterwards. Then you've got the whole world of the online which I haven't bought in to, I just don't enjoy reading a comic online, perhaps the screen gets in the way, I'm old school like a lot of people I think. I still like to have something tactile in your hands and feel the paper and flick through and there's something limiting about a screen and also it's uncomfortable staring at a screen for hours and hours. I do that enough when I'm working on it. When you're staring at it, reading something, it can strain the eyes. Maybe I'm getting old.

I: Have you seen anything online that been of worth or note, or have you not ventured into it really?

B: Not comic wise, I haven't looked at a lot of comic stuff recently but I look up artists and flick through every now and then and see what's out there. There's some brilliant artist out there I think I showed you some earlier that are fantastic, not comic artists. How about you? Anything in particular?

I: There's something called Poy and it's this online, moving, it's like a motion comic but it's not a motion comic. But again I didn't read it.

B: Actually I did see something the other day, it popped up on Facebook Page somewhere and it was an animation, it might even have been on your site I don't know,

but somebody had taken a piece of animation software, they had taken a drawing by an artist, I think it was a comic artist and they had animated it. It was really clever, they turned the 2D head and they'd taken these anchor points at different places around the face and had obviously stretched and used the existing single drawing to animate the whole head. He turned and raised his eyebrows and then made a movement with his mouth and it was brilliant. There was another one which was a Warg from Lord of the Rings and there was a Goblin sitting on it's back and the whole thing was moving like it was breathing and it was from one drawing, taking these anchors points. I did look at that and think, you could do that with existing comic panels and it would work really well. You only need a tiny bit of movement in a comic panel, you don't need it because if the medium is done properly it's fantastic, but maybe putting something onto a new medium, online, if you don't do something else with it are you missing a trick? You should use all of the abilities that you have you know? Perhaps the medium needs to advance and change and adapt, perhaps younger people want more from a comic. But there is a fine line between a comic, animation and movie. Once you start to move a comic page then you are treading very closely into animation. Moving comics is interesting, I suppose there's room for everything really.

I: **Yeah, the amount of people I've interviewed who, as soon as I mention the word motion comics, and they think of the Watchmen one and a few other ones are disgusted at the idea of them.**

B: Well you always get people like that don't you? I remember going to see the Watchmen movie or Lord of the Rings, both great examples of a fantastic well love original idea being translated into a mother medium. My attitude is that you have to treat it as a new event, it's not a comic, Watchmen movie is not a comic, it can't be the comic and you have to accept that sacrifices will be made when you cross over into a new media and I think it was the same for the movie, although I think there were some other issues with the movie, I think both of them I enjoyed, I thought they were

awesome pieces of movie making. I prefer to start with a clean slate but a lot of fans and devotees get very pissed off if you change anything at all. I don't really buy into that.

I: Fans seem to have a lot more weight now I think because of the internet. There was a character called Dazzler from Marvel and she was an 80's rollerskating Disco girl…

B: I can remember adverts for that in comics.

I: A few years ago they tried to relaunch her but they thought there's no point doing an 80's skating Disco girl because if she was 20 at the time and we bring the same character back in continuing terms then she's 60 so let's redo it so that she's into 90's or current music, really loves pop and fans went absolutely ape poo…

B: Was she still rollerskating?

I: I don't know.

B: Inline skating?

I: After a petition and things Marvel changed her back.

B: Do you want to date it? Can you not move on? Sherlock is a great example, the TV series. I love the old movies, the books as well, but the old movies are fantastic. Black and white moves and there's some brilliant stuff there. But it works, the new series is fantastic, brought up to modern day London and it keeps so much of the old ethos. I think if you keep it set in an old time period then your really limiting the whole idea. You've got to be able to bring it forward and anyway, it's only a temporary thing.

It's only one movies or one series, it's not ruining anything. It's just another version and there's plenty of room for new versions. If it doesn't work it doesn't work. Stop crying about it, that's what I say.

I: That works with people's hatred of perhaps reading online if they're just technophobes. Some people are just like, I just like comics the way they are and are not wanting to go and explore. I think the argument of the tactile is different and there are people who argue, like you were saying, collecting comics has it's disadvantages with bulk whereas a file…

B: Yeah, when I talk about collecting comics and my preference I don't think that's necessarily the right way to go. There's also an ecological and environmental issue isn't there if you're printing things. If you have a medium where you don't have any wastage, at least in the immediate term, where you're not chopping down trees to make paper then there's a very good argument there. But then you're going to use a lot of electricity sitting with your monitor on. The entry comes from somewhere. There's lots of issues involved but I think for me it's more of a comfort thing and I think I don't really want to be staring at screens all the time. It can be quite addictive as well. There are all sorts of studies that have been going on for years about the effect of screens, whether it's television screens,   computer screens, how they stimulate responses in the brain the same way that drugs do. That doesn't mean that it's bad for you but it shows that there's an addictive quality to it. I have a son, who unless you tell him not to, will sit and stare at a screen all day long like a   lot of kids so there are issues to do with the medium as well and how you get rid of them I don't know. You don't want to go into a right wing government situation where they're telling you you can only look a t a screen for half an hour a day. It's a complicated issue.

I: Yeah, I don't know the answer.

B: No-one does Will, no-one does, don't even try!

I: There seems to be more and more movies, not just the superhero ones, but more movies that seem to be going to comics for stories. Do you think comics are becoming like R&D four? The movie industry in some ways?

B: I think there's a huge amount of talent working in comics. The thing with comics, I remember being told this by talented artists and writers already working in the industry, the beauty of a comic is that you don't need to make a set, you don't need to employ a special effects artist, you don't need to imply all the actors so it's a very cheap medium. Ostensibly it's very cheap. That's counterbalanced by the time it takes to draw a comic and other things, but you can have a scene like this for example with every Marvel character involved and it's very cheap, you only need to pay the artist to draw it and it's done. So I think naturally you get a lot of people and talent drawn towards comics because they have a lot of freedom to express themselves. Whereas if you go into the movie industry or TV, you're limited by the budgets that you're going to be allowed. So I think that's why there are so many great ideas in comics because they're free to express themselves and there are all sorts of comics out there and great companies producing avant garde stuff, off the wall stuff and unusual stories. So I suppose it's natural. And I think a lot of people appreciate that for years Hollywood has had it's head firmly up it's own ass, it was regurgitating stuff and hacking stuff up. There was a trend to tailor a story exactly for the audience piece by piece, every piece will stimulate exactly the right place in   the audience, finish it off with a nice happy ending, boy kisses the girl and all the rest of it and that's been going for years and that's just stale. I think a lot of people willing to shake things up end up working in comics as well.

I: What's interesting is, as you were saying, money wise with comics it can be cheap but at the same time it's famously poorly paid.

B: I think the few successful people who have worked their way up to the top fully deserve it but for the majority of artists and writers in any creative industry its a bit of a slog. There are far more people doing it for the love of it and I think it's the same in modern society. Without getting too far down the political track, it's part of our culture, our Neo liberal capitalist culture, that's the way it works. There's not a lot of money which does make it difficult. It's not easy for a writer but in some respects, it can be easier to produce the artwork. Unless you're a very minimalist style of artist it does take a long time and if you've got another job it's hard to produce anything of any length when you're working full time and you have a family. There are lots of people like me doing that. But for a writer I think it's a little bit easier to get a body of work together. It's probably harder to get seen as a writer because you have to count on someone reading it whereas as an artist you can flash it in front of somebody and say 'look, I'm brilliant'. A writer has to get someone to sit down and read through pages of work. But certainly, they can sit down and produce pages of work faster so that's an advantage.

I: I read that working on storyboarding for movies pays really well but can be very simplistic and you wouldn't need to go to the level of detail that perhaps you would in a comic. Writing for movies as well, it's an odd world.

B: It's a crossover world isn't it? I've seen storyboard artists and work and most of it's very sketchy, trying to convey the movement. It's not really the same as the comic medium but it's similar, it's moving in that direction and I think they do get more money for doing that.   But I think most comic artists are trying to reproduce the stuff that inspired them as a kid, that they loved. Somehow when I draw this, Im just mimicking the artwork I saw as a kid, that I loved, that inspired me and that's why they do it. I've thought about going into storyboarding but I just don't have the passion to do it and perhaps that's an attitude that won't get me lots of money in the immediate term but I do things because I love doing them and for me that comes first. So I'm really not interested in doing storyboarding but I guess if someone offered me huge amounts of

money my arm could be twisted but when I draw, this is the sort of stuff I want to draw, this style.

I: Comic art I think is so much harder to do. When you're drawing panel for panel what you would see in a film you don't need to think persai, whereas with a comic, as Scott McCloud says, you have the gutter so you have this time traveling device and you as an artist need to consciously think about that.

B: You become a director as well as an artist, but there's different relationships between artist and writers. Sometimes the writer will write in. I know Alan Moore used to be incredibly detailed with his guidelines so the artist would have to write in everything that he put in without fail. Supposedly he would loose his rag if the artist didn't, that's what I've been told. But certainly there are relationships with artists and writers where the writer is doing a lot of the director, alternatively the old Marvel way was very loose where the artist was doing a lot of the work and I think Stan Lee introduced the idea where the writer gave the artist the bare bones and the artist would actually script it panel by panel, they would create it. But there's a lot of room in between. I think the modern artist these days is very much a director. As you say they have all these various tools, the gutter, the different shapes of panels, the lengths and the timescale, how you read across the page and that's the wonderful, complicated beauty of how you read a comic page and the challenge as well really.

I: From working on 2000AD, you were working and then you decided to go to art school, is that right?

B: I did, yeah, many years later.

I: To hone your skills to get back to comics or just to learn art?

B: When I got work with 2000AD I had already applied to go to university to study fine art and   I think, probably to do with the relationships in this country to do with comics and art and the public perception. As a kid I remember being told that comics wasn't art, a particular British attitude at the time. But fine art was real art. So I grew up with the idea that you   were not an artists unless you could do great landscapes or whatever it was, conceptual art. There was that desire in some sort of way to prove that I could also produce art of a different type but also because of an interest in it. It's another aspect of being an artist so   although ironically once I'd given up almost on the idea of becoming a comic artist, that's when I got the opportunity, and I'd turned to fine art instead, that's when it all happened at the same type. But I studied sculpture at university and also turned down work at the time   to pursue and finish my degree.

I: Was there a big gap between drawing comics and then picking it up as a passion again?

B: Yeah, it was always there, it changed my attitude toward art in general as the process of university and growing up will but I was working as a sculptor and a fine artist for a few years and then thought, actually, do you know what, it's okay but I like comics. I liked telling stories, I think that was the main thing, telling stories. So I picked it back up again and decided to write my own story which I've been working on and also start writing, start writing a novel. I think having the control over what I produce and not having to tailor it to other people's needs, that frees you up and was quite enjoyable even though it's difficult to make money that way I think long term that's more satisfying.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS: 2 Speakers

SPEAKERS

WILL HILL: **I**

Thom Burgess   T

I: Starting with your first comic Malevolents. Deciding to write a comic is it something that you always wanted to do?

T: Yeah, I've always wanted to do a ghost story in comic form I had the initial idea the outline for a ghost story for Ghoster, about the league of assassins that chase ghosts effectively. But realised just the extent of it what be too large so I thought the best place for it would be like a 20 -24 page one shot so Malevolents cam about from there really. And from that I really just been a huge fan of horror and scary stuff so its just a great excuse to get back into all my loves are horror movies and ghost stories and try and outline some really scary scenes and try to put that within the medium of a comic and see if you can still tell a ghost story in such a visual media.

I: So with Ghoster you knew that you wanted to create a comic but felt it was to big a project at first and Malevolent's was designed to test the what could be achieved on a smaller scale?

T: Yes-It was with a view to hope fully try and get traction to Ghoster and test the feasibility of producing a comic. To get a hands-on feel of how easy it was, what kind of budgetary restrictions you might have and I suppose what the learning curve of working with an illustrator. How I would need to go about story boarding panels, scenes. I thought launch with Ghoster which would have been a 100 page graphic novel. Its much easier to start on a smaller scale.

I: **Finding artists, was it people you knew or did you have to search online?**

T: I used a website called people per hour to do that. I literally put a project up on there for people to apply for. I t was just something were I thought I could cage the market and see what kinds of people would be interested in working on it. I had quite a few applications from people that were everywhere form London through to Croatia and Singapore. As it's a world wide website, anyone can apply for it, if they want too. And I was really lucky because a very talented artist came forward Joe Becci. Who is based in Medway. Because of his proximity and the fact that he had done some fantastic intricate line work before in his previous work. He tried out a few pages and I really liked what he did and thought his tone would suit a ghost story well. So it went from there really

I: **In terms of selling the comic once it was completed where did you go and how did you advertise it?**

T: Initially I suppose I was probably quite naïve to the process and I hadn't really thought it through as such. I sort out some different printers of comics. and I for instance I was given a comic book in which was very impressed with the final print and quality of it. So I used them as the printer called UK comics press. But from there I pretty much self-published. Sold through myself friends, family, and eventually looked to publish online. But in doing so funnily enough it caught attention of comic a publisher called Geeky Comics. They effectively picked you Malevolents in the end and they published it at several different expos. So it toured around the UK for I suppose a year of so. Which really helps with exposer.

I: **Doing it from self printing vs online did you see any that might have benefits over the other?**

T: I think if I had perhaps focused on one or the other. For instance, if I had focused on online sales and put together a marketing campaign then I probably could have got a bit more traction to it. But again, its down to experience. Not knowing the business quite as well and it was just a great opportunity to get made in the printed form and to get it out there.

I: **Since then you have had two more comics published. The Eyrie and Hallows Fall. What would you say from Malevolents to where you are now you have learnt?**

T: Defiantly I would say the outlining process of the story. Where Malevolents was really enjoyable to do and great fun to get my teeth in to, doing quite a scary ghost story or hopefully doing a scary ghost story. But in the same sense there wasn't much of a narrative flow to it I felt. The Eyrie, which was the next comic, I wrote. I really wanted to do something that felt like a proper Ghost story with a start, middle and finish. So, I learnt a lot in terms of the flow of it n that sense. I suppose Patron vile, suspension between double page spreads and turning a page to hopefully see something that would be unnerving and taking that into account with the actual printing process. So maybe having the right amount of pages so that would equate to the final output when that's printed.

T: Also, the opportunity of having a foreword as well. I have been really lucky forewords and having Reece Shearsmith do the Eyrie and Owen ……. Do Hallows Fall has been such an honour. And involving people that I see as having some sense influenced the work even in some small level is a real privilege to have them involved.

I: **How do you get them onboard to write the forewords?**

I what was incredibly informal to be honest. With Reece Shearsmith for instance I sent out a couple of copies of Malevolents first time round to people that I liked in terms of people that put out similar kinds of content, dark horror style stories. I have for a long time been a fan of The League of Gentleman, anything Reece Shearsmith related. So I sent him a copy and funnily enough it was through doing a podcast via a friend Dan Baines. He was in fact friends with Reece, and he then followed me on Twitter after I did the Podcast. So I was able to direct message him and I was able to ask him if he had received the comic and he said that he hadn't but he really wanted to read it. So I sent him a copy and he loved it. He was really kind and shared some images on his Twitter and so on the back of that I wondered if he would be interested in doing a foreword and he was really generous and agreed to. Same with Hallows Fall. Again in an informal manor, I reached out to ……. I loved The Hallow I thought it was really emotive for a horror story and effective as well and kind of harked back to the heyday of 80's horror but in the same time had a lot of fantastic folk horror troupes that Britain's well know for. Again he was very responsive and more then happy to get back. He really liked the Eyrie and he is from Sussex originally so that was a great link as well.

I: You set up a Ghost Story website where you review others works and discuss folk legends etc. Was that another device to raise your profile as a Horror comic creator?

T: I was defiantly with a view that, I suppose I had been working on the concept of Ghoster on and off for four years and I felt that I really should do something with it. So I set up GreatBritishGhost Stories.com. It was partly I had long interest in Ghost stories. Being from Canterbury, Canterbury has a long history with Ghost stories. And its not a very well know fact but carries the title of being the origin of the modern ghost story as well. So it seemed a perfect fit to try and do something. I had been designing a lot of magazines and I though I could do something supernatural and try and get exposure. I was putting together a mood board for Ghoster and the website put me in a position

where I could interview lots of different directors. From that angle I had the opportunity to interview several horror directors that I really admired, Toby Meakins in particular. I really loved his work and I sent him Ghoster. He loved the concept and thought it was great andt hen just over a year later he was signed to 360 agency in Beverly Hills. Once there he was looking for a new project to work on and asked if I would be interested in collaborating with Ghoster in terms of a larger spectrum of the concept. But yeah the website was down with the view to hopefully push Ghoster. It was a bit of a long-term plan but it worked.

I: With your partnership with Toby you created a short teaser and went to America. Could you discuss that?

T: So we sent about a year putting together a rough outline for the immediate story of Ghoster. From there following the standard platform of most filmmakers or creators we looked to do proof of concept. Initially we looked to do a filmed short. Effectively a case of having to find location, actors, we had several different concepts that we wanted to put into practice but we eventually set on a character that would back flip and shot a ghost. Told in the medium of a ghost story with some history to it. From there we worked with a producer and we looked at locations in London. Eventually we were very lucky to get into a place called Tobacco Dock. Which is just near Whopping on the dockside of the terms. It's got a really rich history and Tobacco Dock itself is really well known for it Expos, tattoos conventions and some French bizarre contempory conventions. But at the same time it has these beautiful vaulted ceilings down below. So we were very lucky as we get the last office in there to be converted so it still had effectively the basis of a 17th century, what effectively would have been part of the old dock. Which gave the location a really great timeless element.
We cast someone to play the Ghoster and someone to play the ghost, the Malevolent. And then it was a case of costuming and we were very lucky to have a guy who is really really talented, who worked on Malicifants headdress for Angelina Jolie performance

which is quite cool. And he made a custom suit. And we worked with a prop house to get blunderbusses which were painted up to look out of time again. We had a mask created and also of course we had a special effects company. Toby the director knew a guy called Jonathan Hows and he created the effect of the silver coins that rip through the ghost. It was quite a long process. We filmed it one September in 2015 and it was a day shot. From there, there was quite a lot of post and sound engineering on top. We took it out to LA in October 2016 with a pitch book, which had illustrations from the original concept illustrator Joe Becci who worked on Malevolents. Full chronicles which we spent months working on, which basically was a history that dates back to 5000BC, which details the whole history of the Ghosters. And yeah, we had a series of meetings, God it would have been aout 15 or so meetings in total. So we met with the likes of Safe House that at the moment are dealing with Robin Hood that's coming out this year with Jaime Fox and Taron Egerton. They dealt with Guy Ritchie's King Arthur. We also met also Getaway and Legendary and a host of others and it got a really great response. But the general consensus was that perhaps there is so much lore to fit into it that it would work out better as a TV series rather then a film. So since then we have been working on pitching it as a more direct TV series. My partner Toby is taking it out again this August with a view to pitch it as a TV series.

I: When you published the teaser video that you made it appeared to quickly gain a lot of accolades and positive responses on social media?

T: Yeah although I'm never sure on Facebooks weird algorithms and the fact that it charges people for exposure and I'm not quite sure on the exposure and I know that's in debate in the news quite a lot recently. It's something which consistently we have taken out to different people and different people have said 'this is great and we can see legs with this'. The stories are very much a cross genre story. It's a ghost story, at the same time it' very much female empowered, its very current at the moment and it involves ghosts which are known across the world so you would hope that there is a broad

appeal there. But cross fingers we think from the reactions that we have had so far that there is potential for it so we will just see how it goes I suppose.

I: With it being so well received as a concept based on the trailer and the feedback that it will work well as a TV show. Is there any point to continuing it as a comic?

T: We would still love to do a comic, defiantly. And although we have a history book we would even like to expand that into, I suppose a look book come history book, so no not all. We would still like to do that. The ideal would be to do something simultaneously. Like I understand Jane Goldman did with Kick Ass. The fact that was released and obviously orchestrated alongside a comic. The great thing with Ghoster is you could do something that is based in the actual narrative flow of the story but at the same time you can go sideways and do something with another Ghoster in another country. Or you could go and do a prequel so you can go and create a Victorian comic about it. It's kind of limitless to that extent.

I: It sounds like IP to which you have a huge sand box to play with?

T: Yes, and its very British at the heart of it but at the same time it got very modern sensibilities. There's for instance Ghosters who have mixed race parents which have important context to the story right through to American Ghosters coming over here and hunting different Malevolents from different time periods. So yeah, its hopefully quite a broad appeal.

I: When you came up with the concept did you envision it as a movie more then a comic or was it that you just wanted the story out there so to speak in whatever form you could?

T: Yes I it was very much that I just wanted it out there. The initial go to was that I have always loved graphic novels. I have always loved the work of Alan Moore and obscure one-shot stuff like Improper Books. Who did the Porcelain series and I really loved that, and Briar. And you've got that's bizarre on s-shot stories which stand on there own but they beautifully capsulate a moment in time or a sensibility and I really though that would be fantastic to do a ghost story with. So I came up with a very loose outline and the initial go to was I just want to get this out there. And at the time printed media seemed the best way to do that. And don't get me wrong I still want to see it as a graphic novel.

I: What experience have you had with publishers especially when considering copyright to your creations?

T: Yeah so I suppose there is an ongoing thread of copyright sign over, were a lot of publishers and I mean that in the sense of movie makers and film studios. Have creators approaching a studio for instances and that studio will maintain the rights to a lot of the IP that is passed over to them by the creator. Im not saying its right or wrong but there is a current trend in that. Michael Bay and Eli Roth are quite notorious for this.

I: How would you define success in the comic industry?

T: I'd deem a success to be when you gain positive notoriety from your peers of your chosen genre within comics/graphic novels. Also, a healthy amount of sales and interest in your books. I see that as down to a mixture of publishing and self-publishing. Certainly, in my case it would be if Ghoster were to be finalised into a graphic novel and then released to a largely positive audience. I'd absolutely take that as success in some small form.

I: Who in the comic industry do you see as a success?'

T: For me I would deem people such as Alan Moore, Mark Millar and obviously Stan Lee as all notable successes within comics. As they've gained a positive reputation through their work within the comic industry which has subsequently crossed over into the mainstream (via movies, television and merchandise.) I think that's a particularly hard thing to do, and requires an extensive amount of strategic planning and foresight with your work. Which is always difficult as comics and graphic novels require a vast amount of work in themselves.

Whilst Alan Moore clearly isn't a fan of most of his film adaptations, and from what I understand has removed himself from being any part of most of them, the fact his work (which arguably isn't always very mainstream and even arguably in a lot of cases can be quite 'fringe') has still gained a devoted and dedicated mainstream fan base is hugely impressive.

How to Make Comics the Successful Way

An Investigation into the Strategies for Successful Comics Creators

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by

Will Hill

Please refer to our [Research Privacy Notice](#) for more information on how we will use and store your personal data*.*

Background

This study plans to explore the different methods that a comics creator may utilise to find success within the comics industry, these methods include classical approaches such as periodical comics and newspaper strips as well as the more contemporary avenues such as self-publishing & web-comics.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to take part in a recorded 30min – 1hour interview. I will be asking questions to try to discover how they the interviewees view the comic industry, their own work and possible pathways to success.

To participate in this research, you must:

Have a keen knowledge of Comics. That's it! If you have been involved as a creator of comics that's even better. But passion and a willingness to discuss comics is a must.

Procedures

You will be asked to take part in a semi structured interview. I am willing to travel to you or I can happily arrange a location to meet. Let me know what suits you best.

Feedback

After the interviews are complete I will happily share any information with you. If I record any information that you don't feel is arcuate or you would like to be removed you can request this be removed from the thesis.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

The following categories of personal data (as defined by the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR)) will be processed:

- Personal name of interviewee and opinions expressed in interview via a written transcript or recording.

We have identified that the public interest in processing the personal data is:

- To understand your view point as a comics creator. Personal data will be used to reflect on your experiences and knowledge. From the data gathered I plan to create a documentation listing practical strategies for success

Data can only be accessed by, or shared with:

Will Hill

The identified period for the retention of personal data for this project:

Data will be kept on file until the completion of the thesis.

If you would like to obtain further information related to how your personal data is processed for this project please contact william.hill@canterbury.ac.uk.

You can read further information regarding how the University processes your personal data for research purposes at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors-office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx

Dissemination of results

The completed MA thesis will be published in the CCCU library and available on CCCU Research Space website.

Process for withdrawing consent to participate

You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in this research project at any time without having to give a reason. To do this please email william.hill@canterbury.ac.uk with your request to leave the research project.

You may read further information on your rights relating to your personal data at the following link: Research Privacy Notice - https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/university-solicitors- office/data-protection/privacy-notices/privacy-notices.aspx

Any questions?

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